Guitar & Bass FEBRUARY 2015

VINTAGE ⁞ DIY ⁞ INTERVIEWS ⁞ TECHNIQUE ⁞ REVIEWS

Guitar & Bass

New Epiphone & Martin reviews

PLUS
Orange
Martin Turner
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iPad Guitar Guide
and more...

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February 2015 Vol 26 No 05 £4.25
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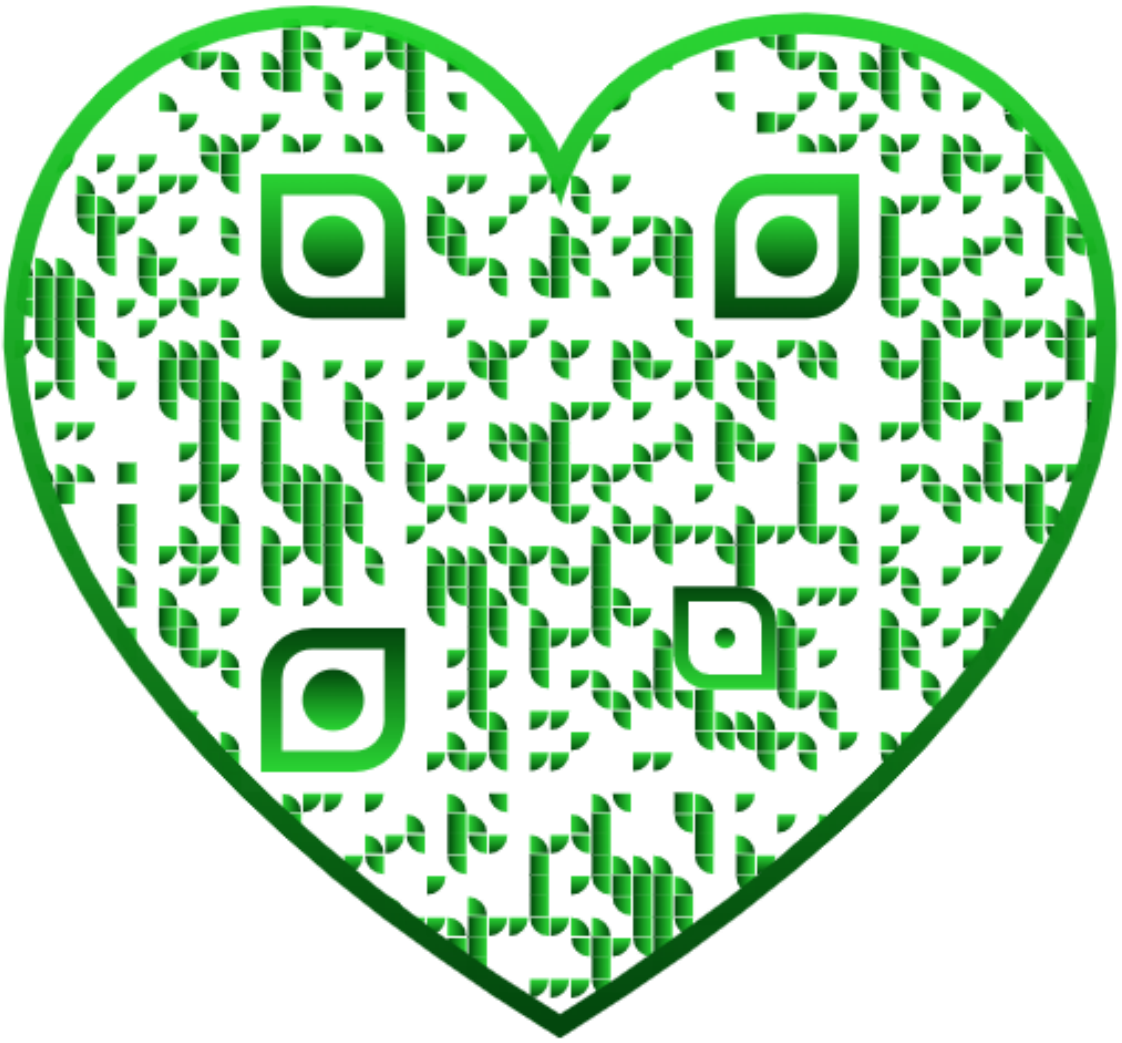

G-400 PRO

Equipped with Pro ALNICO CLASSIC by EPIPHONE

G-400 PRO

- Available in 1961 or 1966* version
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- NEW - Coil-tapping on both pickups
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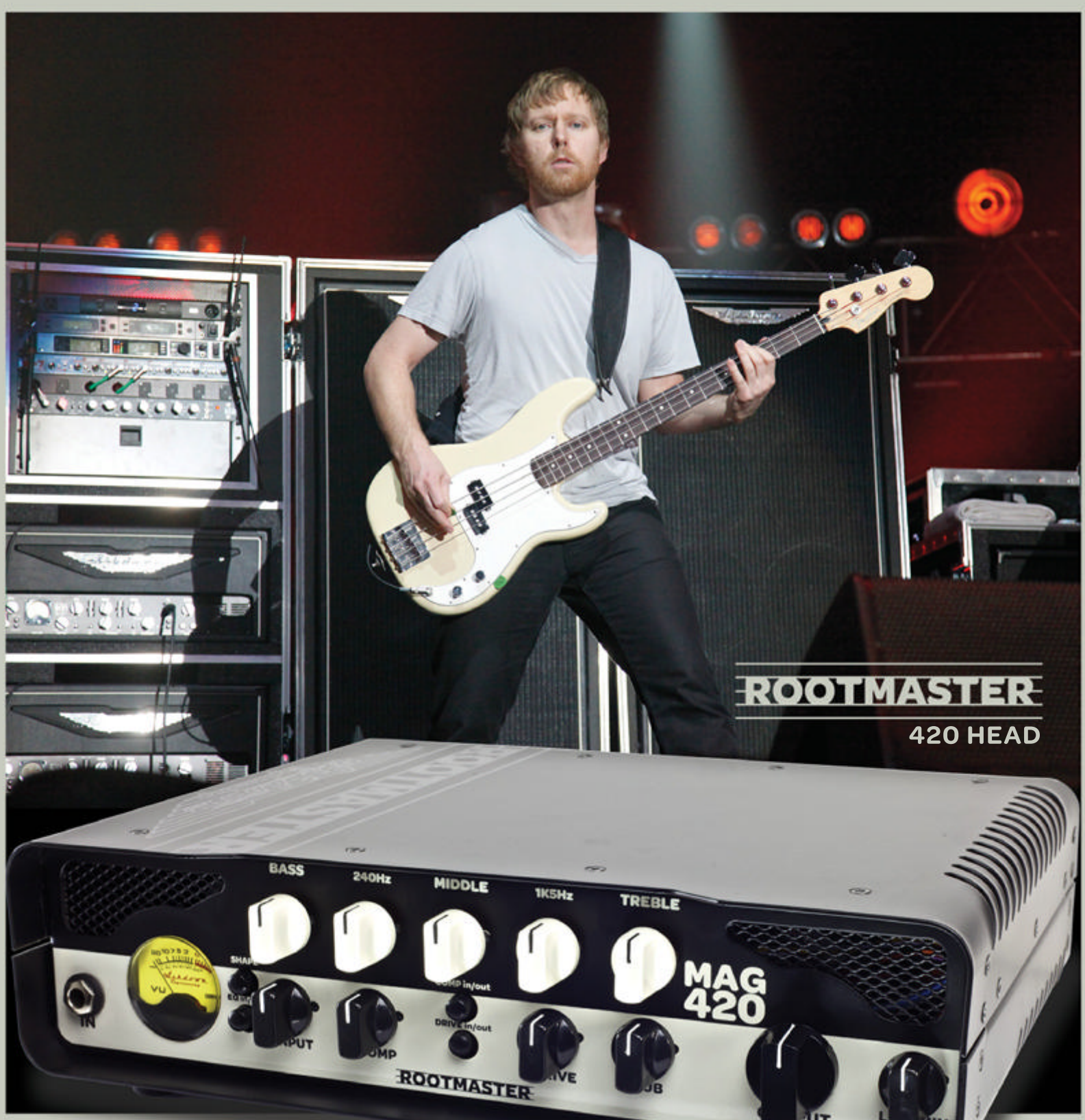

FEATURES:

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The power, the kingdom & the glory...

There are plenty of things to celebrate about British guitar culture from the beat boom all the way up to today but the pioneering work of UK amplifier builders is surely one of the most important. Although we talk about 'the British amp sound' perhaps the truth is that each company, from Vox to WEM to Marshall, had a unique sound which fuelled wonderful music from many players in so many different ways. We thought it was time the history and legacy of these amps was highlighted for all to appreciate.

Anybody seeking the lowdown on the latest gear is also in for plenty of love this issue, as intriguing hardware from Epiphone, Orange, Martin, DigiTech and Burns – and much more – goes under the microscope.

On top of that we have top quality interviews with the likes of Martin Turner and Bernard Butler, not to mention a sumptuous *Private Collection,* plus vintage wit and wisdom from Phil Harris and Sid Bishop. We hope all this keeps your guitar flame burning through the month – and there's always digital fun to be had at www.guitar-bass.net when you have a spare moment. Best of luck with all your guitar-based endeavours...

John

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BERNARD BUTLER
Guru of guitar

Photo: Mike Prior

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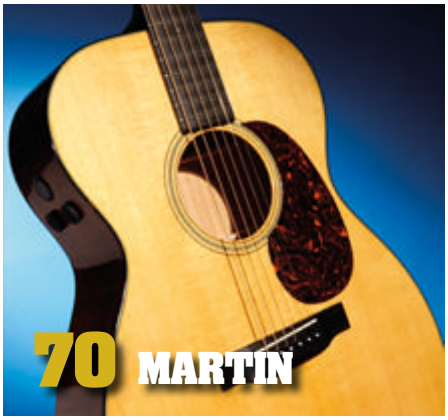

Gear

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A signature model that borrows from the '70s Artisan but adds P90-style tones at the neck

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A budget guitar and amp that punch well above their weight and come with many extras

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B INSPIRED

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Reverberations

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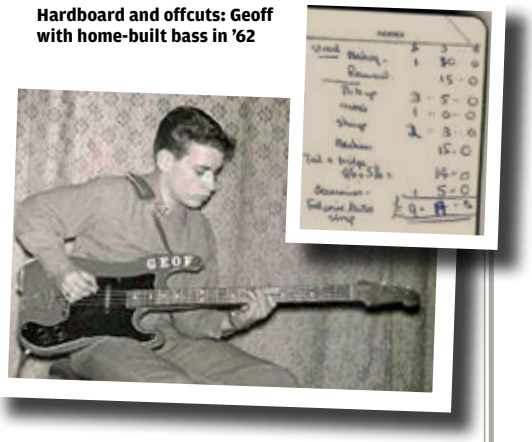
STAR LETTER

BASS BUILDING: A TEENAGE ODYSSEY

Reading through your excellent *Build A Guitar* article in the January issue brought back memories of the first guitar I owned, a handmade bass I somehow constructed in the spring of 1962. I'd been asked to join a 'beat group' as a bass man. Although I hadn't a clue as to how a bass guitar worked, let alone how to play one, I elected to make one myself. I looked in all the music shop windows I could find and pored over the very few catalogues and music magazines around and opted for the shape of Jet Harris's Fender Precision (of course).

Mahogany off-cuts from a timber yard for body and neck, hardboard for the scratchplate, a wiring diagram provided by a school classmate, and I was off. The maths needed to calculate fret distances was much too complex for me, so I borrowed an acoustic guitar and copied over the fingerboard measurements onto paper and scaled them up onto a piece of rosewood donated by a neighbour. The neck was stained as natural as I could make it and the body was of course red, with a black scratchplate. A standard guitar pickup plus fretwire was bought from the nearest music store, and controls for volume and tone came from Garlands electrical store in Deptford Broadway. With bass strings added I was in business, at a total cost of £9.19s.0d (£9.95). Unfortunately without a truss rod the neck only lasted a few months and so I eventually persuaded dad to stand HP guarantor for a Japanese Top Twenty bass, but my homemade 'Fender' did me proud during my early days!

Geoff Smith *via email*



Hardboard and offcuts: Geoff with home-built bass in '62

***G&B* Hats off, Geoff, for such a tale of bass-building derring-do. Such ingenuity and endeavour should be recognised and applauded. Has anyone else got a home-made special? Feel free to send it through to the magazine. Alternatively, just take a picture and tweet us @Guitarmagazine and mark it with #showoffyouraxes.**

Rosetti

Written a Star Letter? Contact Rosetti on 01376 550033 to claim your D&A stand or wallhanger. To have a look at the full D&A range: www.rosetti.co.uk/dandastands

AND THE FIGURES ARE IN...

I've enjoyed the *Soundtrack Of My Life* feature ever since it started in June 2012. In an idle moment, I thought it might be fun to see which musicians or bands and albums have been most nominated so far (up to the December 2014 issue). According to my calculations, Jimi Hendrix is the most nominated musician, having been chosen 18 times. Next comes Eric Clapton (counting the Cream, Derek and the Dominoes, and the Bluesbreaker *Beano* albums), with 13 nominations. No other artist or band reaches double figures. The most chosen album is *Are You Experienced?* (seven times), followed by the *Beano* album (five times). Since this is, after all, a guitar magazine, these results might not be thought too surprising. But to set them in context, there have been nearly 290 choices to date, showing there has been a huge variety of music selected so far, which is what I'm sure we all want!

***Are You Experienced* – our artists' #1 album**

Derek Slade *via email*

***G&B* First things first, a thousand thanks for taking the time and trouble to compile these figures, Derek. Whilst it's understandable that the likes of Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton have been incredibly influential, it's comforting to know that guitar players are inspired by a wide range of music. We promise you that if it ever becomes too predictable, we'll give the feature a decent burial...**

THE MYSTERY OF GIBSON

I really enjoyed reading the feature in the January issue on Gibson amplifiers. It had always been a bit of a mystery to me how Gibson didn't succeed with amplifiers the way Fender did. I bought a Lab Series L5 combo in the early '80s and used it right through to 2005. It was a really great amp, although it was as heavy as hell, built like a tank and certainly loud. Despite frequently being left in a cold, damp, dusty garage for long spells while I tried other smaller and lighter amps, it always sounded fantastic when I brought it out for use at bigger gigs... remarkably responsive for a transistor amp and a great clean tone. Shame the link between Gibson and Moog didn't develop beyond that. Co-incidentally, I saw Kelly Jones of the Stereophonics on TV recently with a Gibson amp behind him. Perhaps they are becoming cool.

Gibson amps: cool once more

Patrick Kilgallon *via email*

Woke up this mornin'...

NEWS

Learn To Play Day

Encourage your friends and family to take up an instrument, with free music lessons on offer on one special day in March

Learn To Play Day is fast becoming an immensely popular and important fixture on the UK musical calendar. Last year the event was responsible for people taking advantage of over 10,000 free taster music lessons, delivered by fully qualified music teachers, across 117 different UK venues including music shops, live venues and even churches. This year's event, the fourth Learn To Play Day, will take place on Saturday 21 March as organisers Music For All attempt to top the number of lessons dished out last year, bringing novices or lapsed musicians of all kinds back into the fold.

Music For All Ambassadors include many famous names – Jools Holland currently holds the title of LTPD Patron, Steve Morse, Glenn Hughes, Gordon Giltrap have all signed up, and last year Al Murray, Harry Hill and Pink Floyd's Nick Mason were all out and about giving free music lessons. Guitar and bass are often the most popular instruments, but lessons on drums, keyboards, violin, piano, trumpet, and many others including DJ mixing and singing will be on offer. The aim is to ensure everyone taking part will have the opportunity to play something before they leave their local event. There will be discounts on equipment and special offers on further music lessons, too. To add to the carnival atmosphere, many venues have bands, buskers, and local celebrities coming along to do a turn. It's a great day out with a worthy cause. Go to www.musicforall.org.uk to find your local Learn To Play Day venues and events.

A 12-string in a box

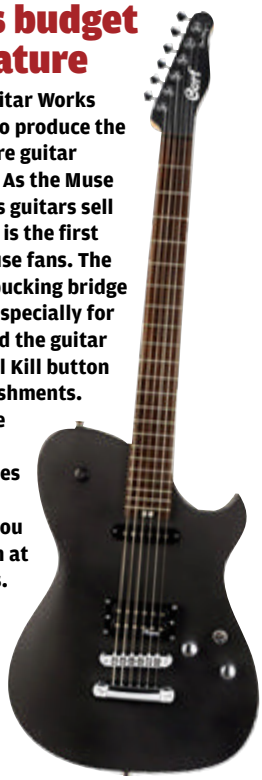
DigiTech believe it has captured the chime, jangle and crisp octave shimmer of a 12-string guitar and installed it into its Mosaic stompbox so it can be yours on tap. The Mosaic uses advanced polyphonic pitch shifting and 'intelligent' doubling algorithms to transform your six-string into a 12-string at the press of a button. The pedal essentially adds an octave up to your low strings and doubles the high strings to create the most authentic sounds possible. Can it really that superior to a good octave pedal? *G&B* will endeavour to answer that question in a future issue. The Mosaic will retail for around £130. See www.digitech.com.

Design your own Eastwood guitar

Canada's Eastwood Guitars has built its reputation brilliantly re-imaging cult, vintage and downright bizarre electric guitars from the past, and now it wants you to submit ideas for new models to its new Custom Shop. The best will be uploaded to the Current Projects Page on the website and you will be able reserve one with a small deposit. Once enough people have signed up for that particular model, the guitar will go to production; three months later your guitar will be ready, you pay the balance, and it will be delivered to your door. A great idea from an innovative company. Go to http://eastwoodcustoms.com and check out which proposed guitars look set to make the grade.

Cort launches budget Bellamy Signature

Matt Bellamy, Manson Guitar Works and Cort have combined to produce the MBC-1, a Bellamy signature guitar that retails for just £499. As the Muse man's Manson MB-1 series guitars sell for over £3000 the MBC-1 is the first viable option for most Muse fans. The single coil neck and humbucking bridge pickups were developed especially for this guitar by Manson, and the guitar is fitted with the essential Kill button for Bellamy-style embellishments. The body is basswood, the high gloss neck is hard maple and the guitar comes equipped with staggered-height locking tuners. If you purchase through Manson at www.mansonguitarworks.com, then the set-up and final inspection will be carried out in the UK by the same techs that produce the UK-made MB-1 series.



BIRMINGHAM GUITAR BONANZA

The Great British Guitar Show has revamped itself and will return to Birmingham's New Bingley Hall on 28 February under the shiny new banner of The Guitar Show. Top exhibitors of the calibre of Fender, Laney and Marshall have already signed up, as have many of the country's finest boutique builders. The live stage line-up is still being finalised but they can already promise performances and appearances from the likes of Ron 'Bumblefoot' Thall (Guns N'Roses) and KK Downing (Judas Priest), with many more to be announced. Advance tickets are available for £12.50, kids aged between 6-13 get in for £6, and any littler ones go free. It's worth noting if you want to get together with some friends and make it a coach trip there are discounts for groups of 10 or more. Keep an eye on updates at www.theguitarshow.co.uk or call 01527 871221.

A PRS for under £400

PRS has unveiled its new SE Standard range boasting retail prices that start at just £399, so street prices could go even lower. The Korean-built SE first emerged in 2001, led by the Santana signature, and there's Standard and Special versions of Santana's axe included in the new line-up. Other PRS stalwarts the Standard 24, 22, Singlecut and Tremonti complete the options. The guitars have all-mahogany construction, PRS designed pickups and many features found on top-of-the-line PRS guitars such as bird inlays, stoptail or trem bridges and Wide Thin or Wide Fat neck carves. A gigbag is included too. Peruse the lot at www.prsguitarseurope.

BECK'S BEGINNINGS: THE DOCUMENTARY

A Man For All Seasons, set for DVD release on 10 February, is an in-depth examination of Jeff Beck's music during the 1960s. The film's makers claim to be the first to focus singularly on Beck's career, from tracing his formative influences and early groups, his work with the Yardbirds, his brief, bizarre reinvention by producer Mickie Most as a solo pop star, and the first, radical incarnation of the Jeff Beck Group. There's a plethora of rare performance and studio footage plus exclusive interviews and contributions from those who worked with Jeff during this period, including the Yardbirds' first manager Giorgio Gomelsky, Simon Napier-Bell and fellow Yardbirds, Jim McCarty & Chris Dreja. For a preview go to http://mvdb2b.com.

Calendar SHOWS, GIGS, FESTIVALS, WORKSHOPS

Zakk Wylde's Black Label Society
11-19 FEBRUARY
Ex-Ozzy Osbourne man brings his leather-clad troupe to the UK with hard'n'heavy riffage a given
WHERE? **Eight shows from Glasgow to London**
TICKETS **from £22.40**
CONTACT **www.blacklabelsociety.com**

King King
20 FEBRUARY - 22 MARCH
Alan Nimmo's blues-rock power house invite Laurence Jones along for a red hot double header
WHERE? **A 21-date trek going just about everywhere**
TICKETS **From £15**
CONTACT **www.kingkingblues.com/www.ents24.com**

Nazareth
23 JANUARY - 1 FEBRUARY
Scotland's veteran '70s rockers hold a special place in many hearts and always put on a hell of a show
WHERE? **Six gigs inc. Hull, Cardiff and Glasgow**
TICKETS **From £13.20**
CONTACT **www.nazarethdirect.co.uk**

Black Keys
27 FEBRUARY - 5 MARCH
This delta-inspired duo may have gone mainstream but that intense, blues mojo still shines through
WHERE? **Seven shows taking in an arena near you**
TICKETS **From £30**
CONTACT **www.theblackkeys.com/tour**

The Wave Pictures
4 - 27 FEBRUARY
Smart indie-rock trio boasting the astounding skills of guitarist David Tattersall. Leftfield and brilliant
WHERE? **17 gigs at intimate venues across the UK**
TICKETS **From £9**
CONTACT **www.thewavepictures.com**

Steve Knightley
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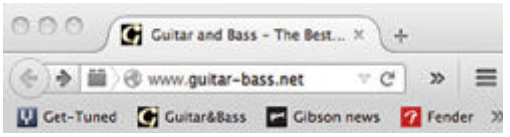
TICKETS **From £15.40**
CONTACT **www.growyourowngig.co.uk**



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Album reviews

Uli Jon Roth

SCORPIONS REVISITED

UDR GmbH

The man who brought us the Sky Guitar returns with a two-disc set recorded live in Hanover, Germany. The album is the fruit of Roth spending a year re-visiting and exploring his favourite Scorpions songs. Was it worth it? Well, yes, for the most part. The track selection on here shows great taste and Roth's mystical brand of hard rock is inventive enough to forge the songs a new, vital identity.

The Waterboys

MODERN BLUES

Harlequin And Clown

Mike Scott's rootsy troupe enrol legendary Muscle Shoals bassist David Hood and Memphis keys man 'Brother' Paul Brown to add a little loose southern groove to the band's folk rock template. It works, too; *Still A Freak* chugs with roadhouse raunch, I *Can See Elvis* sports soulful backing vocals and laidback guitar solos while B*eautiful Now* has something of Tom Petty about it. A refreshing take on a well-loved format.

Duke Garwood

HEAVY LOVE

Heavenly

Garwood has played guitar for Mark Lanegan and the Orb, and along the way has also found time to play clarinet for The Savages and the Archie Bronson Outfit. This, his fifth solo outing, reveals a brooding, gravelly-voiced troubadour reminiscent of Bill Callahan or Bonny Prince Billy. Wistful, rootsy balladry is backed by simmering guitar soundscapes that gently oscillate with haunting power.

Dave Kilminster

...AND THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE...

Killer Guitar

The man whose guitar skills have inspired collaborations with Roger Waters and Keith Emerson has unleashed a fine new solo effort. Of course there are some of the 'He really *didn't* just do that!' type of trademark outrageous soloing, but some of the most impressive tracks on here go further, displaying Kilminster's songwriting and arranging skills, as well as an intimate vocal style that suits the songs down to a tee.

Carl Carlton

LIGHTS OUT IN WONDERLAND

Caroline

Carlton has garnered Grammy nominations for his work as guitar player and producer for the likes of Robert Palmer, Eric Burdon and Joe Cocker. His session work has been curtailed since 2001 when his first solo album appeared, backed by his band the Songdogs. His fifth outing is a soulful rock masterclass with big production and smart tunes that carry it with ease. Breathy vocals and astute guitar lines top off a classy work.

Drew Holcomb & The Neighbors

MEDICINE

Magnolia Music

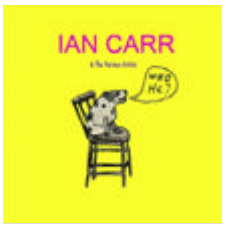
Americana doesn't come much more uplifting than this... a beautiful set of songs that tackle hardship, loyalty and the trials of being an outsider, all done with a warm heart and the promise of redemption always in reach. Despite being based in Nashville, Holcomb and his band – featuring wife Ellie and Nathan Dugger on guitars – have eluded big labels and remained independent. On this evidence there'll be tempting offers afoot.

Ian Carr & The Various Artists

WHO HE?

Reveal

Having worked with Eddie Reader, Kate Rusby and Chris Wood, the frighteningly clever Mr Carr steps in to the spotlight to deliver some piquant cuts of abstract folk music. The technique-minded will appreciate the way Carr can incorporate influences from far-flung genres while never forgetting the tradition; others will just enjoy some great music, as well as the refreshingly earthy style of production.



Hayseed Dixie

HAIR DOWN TO MY GRASS

Nuclear Blast

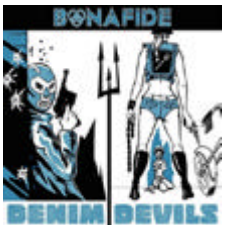
For those unfamiliar with the HD template, these chaps cover popular songs in a riotous bluegrass style. This time around rock behemoths such as *Don't Stop Believin'*, *The Final Countdown* and *We Are The Road Crew* get the Hayseed Dixie treatment. It's all up to their usual superlative standards, and guitar and bass players can get masterclass in tight rhythm playing by playing along.

Bonafide

DENIM DEVILS

Off Yer Rocka

Rough hewn, riff-ridden classic rock from Sweden that draws inspiration from the likes of AC/DC, Free and Kiss. Frontman and guitarist Pontus Snibb not only sports a great name but alongside fellow six-stringer Anders Rosell he rocks up his songs with some raw, righteous, unreconstructed heavy metal thunder; the single *Hold Down The Fort* is a fine case in point. Sleazy rock to party hard to.



SNAP JUDGEMENTS

The Living Eyes

LIVING LARGE

Agitated

This Australian combo deliver scuzzy, stomptastic rock'n'roll that earns favourable comparisons with Antipodean ancestors such as the Hard Ons

Joe Topping

THE VAGRANT KINGS

Fellside

Innovative homegrown bottleneck man with an authentic take on folk, blues and Americana, presents soulful, vibrant tunes to lift the heart and sooth the soul

Kenneth J Nash

THE FALL OF EDEN

Old Hotel

Veteran Brit acoustic songsmith with a poignant hoard of songs built on insightful musing and dextrous arpeggios, all steeped in potent melancholy

The Subways

THE SUBWAYS

YFE/Cooking Vinyl

The trio's fourth long-player has oodles of the vital 'hook-harmony-laden' indie rock that people have come to love them for. Good work all round

David Stockden

TIME DILATION

David Stockden

A classy and at times haunting blend of modern blues, acoustic and Indian sonic timbres, Stockden's latest album is a fine late-night listen

Wray

WRAY

Communicating Vessels

Superior psyche rock of the stark, spacey variety mixing sublime, searing guitar, chugging bass and shimmering echoey vocals into a gloriously mind-altering infusion

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It Might Get Loud: Amps Of The British Invasion

There are few globally famous UK electric guitars, but when it comes to guitar amplifiers, British is best. From Vox to Marshall, to Hiwatt, Orange, Laney and way beyond, **Michael Stephens** charts some of the legendary tales of the great British amps...

In diplomacy, it's acknowledged that the USA and Great Britain have a 'special relationship' – and the same can be said for rock'n'roll guitar. While the most famous guitars, fashions and indeed the frisson of early rock were imported from the US, the British were soon delivering their own crucial riposte of the sonic equation – amplification.

After all, what good is a great electric guitar without a great amp? Without an amp, you may as well swing your Fender Stratocaster in front of a mirror and pretend to play tennis.

The all-American Gibson, Fender, Valco/Supro and others all made legendary amps from the early days, of course, but when the British also got seriously wiring-and-valving from the '50s onwards, it launched the still-enviable phenomenon – the Great British Amp. There have been numerous makes and models amid much innovation, and the growth of truly-global brands. Something, regrettably, you can't say for many British electric guitar makers.

Throughout this article, *Guitar & Bass* enlisted the expertise of veteran British amp engineer David Petersen – who worked for both Vox and Marshall in the glory years – to tell the story of the UK guitar industry's greatest export: the Great British Amp. Warning: it might get loud...

Early Days Of British Amps

Two London-based companies, Selmer and Watkins, were key in the rise of UK amp building. Selmer built their first amplifier as early as 1935, at the company's base in London's Charing Cross Road. Post-WWII, in 1947, they bought a PA company called RSA for their expertise and melded the technology into a more-developed line of early guitar amps. Electric guitar amps were then rare in the UK – there were restrictions on US imports until the late '50s, while war-torn Britain tried to rebuild itself by manufacturing everything on home soil.

At first these Selmers were labelled as RSA/Selmer models – and, although it seems quaint now, the RSA TV6 (5W) was dubbed the Popular, and the Truvoice Model TV15 (circa 10W) called the Stadium. Ten watts or so for a 'stadium', eh? That said, a good tech will tell you with the right mic'ing and PA, you can still deliver killer tone to a stadium with 10W. But that's another story. ↔

A Selmer amp/ lap steel set from the 1940s

Selmer Popular from the 1950s

An early success for Selmer in the US guitar/UK amp combination was The Animals' *House Of The Rising Sun*, a 1964 #1 on both sides of the Atlantic – although The Animals tended to mime on TV with Vox amps, guitarist Hilton Valentine said he played a Gretsch Tennessean through a Selmer for the song's actual recording.

Selmer amps didn't manage to enter the mass-market pantheon of great British guitar amps in the USA, but they remain coveted by aficionados from both nations. Selmer's Zodiac Twin 30 and Zodiac Twin 50 combos (1963-'65), were a likely response to Vox and Marshalls of the day, but remain highly collectable.

Selmer Zodiacs ooze retro cool. They blended mock-crocodile/black vinyl for their outré appearance and a gold script logo that hinted at Selmer's past in saxophones. Plus, there was the 'magic eye' tremolo speed indicator on the front, which pulsed in time to the trem rate. David Peterson opines, 'Those croc-covered Zodiacs were incredibly good-looking. But by then, Selmer had lost ground.'

The Kinks used Selmer 30s on early tracks. Jimmy Page used Selmers on various '60s sessions and in early Led Zeppelin, too. Of now, Bernard Butler sometimes records with a Zodiac 30, as does Arctic Monkeys' Alex Turner. Jack White used a Selmer Zodiac 30 to record the White Stripe's *Elephant* album. Selmer were Brit amp pioneers but, long-term, it didn't last. Even so, you can expect to pay vintage Vox rates for mint '60s Selmer Zodiacs.

Charlie Watkins was another London-based pioneer of the '40s. Watkins was an accordion player, but noticed that 'whenever I went out and did a gig, you couldn't hear the guitar properly once there was a bit of an audience. The guitarists tried putting heavier strings on and playing with heavy plectrums to get what they called "cut-through". This worked for treble, but the sound was very unsatisfactory. Some guitars, such as Gibsons, were beginning to appear with pickups fitted, and you could get contact mics to fit under the strings, but there were no proper amplifiers available – perhaps a few small units for Hawaiian guitars, but nothing good enough to use with normal guitars.'

In the early 1950s, Charlie Watkins used an AC/DC-circuit PA as the basis of his proto guitar amps: until, he said, he 'saw a piece in the *Daily Mirror* about a pop group guitarist getting killed.' Not good. Watkins shelved his amps business for a few years before returning with a range of safer AC-only amps. By 1955, skiffle was big and the guitarists needed amps (to go alongside Watkins/WEM PAs). By the early 1960s, with others' help, Charlie had two early British classics – the Westminster and the Dominator.

From the top: a Selmer Zodiac, a Stadium and a trio of Little Giants

TIMELINE
The history of the British amp

1930s
Henri Selmer's London company start building the first British amps, initially for PA systems

1954
Watkins enter the guitar amp market, bolstering their line of PA systems. 1956's Watkins Dominator amp boasts 17 watts!

1958
Vox debut their AC15 combo. Session legend Bert Weedon and the Shadows are notable users

1959
Vox market the AC30, as The Shadows wanted more volume. The AC30 is famously used by the Beatles, the Stones and, later, Brian May and The Edge

1962
Marshall start building amps, notably the JTM45 - later used by Eric Clapton on John Mayall's Blues Breakers' 'Beano' album

Above, a Watkins Dominator; below, a pair of Westminsters

The Watkins Dominator – although a great 'buy me' name – delivered no worldwide domination, but it was a boon to Brit wannabe rockers. In his wry book about early Brit rock'n'roll, *17 Watts*, seasoned bassist Mo Foster remembers his school band the Tradewinds, who had a 5-watt amp already, but boldly traded-up to a Watkins Dominator.

'Do we really need that much power?' guitarist Peter Watkins (no relation to the amp) asked. Even Foster wasn't sure. But when Mo Foster was playing bass for Jeff Beck in the 1970s, his amp backline was a massive 1500W, the equivalent of no less than 88 Watkins Dominators. Loud was soon to become the new lord...

Vox Populism

The first British amp maker to 'conquer' America was Vox – with a little help from their friends. The Vox brand grew from the Jennings Organ Company, founded by Tom Jennings in Dartford, Kent. In 1956, Jennings was shown a prototype guitar amp made by Dick Denney, a big band guitarist and workmate from their WWII days as munitions workers. They renamed the company Jennings Musical Industries (or JMI) and in 1958 launched the 15W Vox AC15. Bert Weedon recorded many sessions with a Vox AC15, as did Vic Flick (of the James Bond theme). The Shadows were also early fans, using AC15s even before Hank Marvin had acquired his legendary red Stratocaster.

Hank later recalled: 'Vox was one of the first companies to get onto artists and groups so they could promote their amplifiers. In fact, I tried Fender amplifiers first, but preferred the sound of the Vox with the Strat, because I think it was more of a raw sound. The Fender amplifier, to my ear sounded a little too smooth with a Strat, and I seemed to get more guts out of a Vox.'

Rear view of Vox AC15

One of Marvin's key words here is 'promote'. Vox were – and still are – brilliant at marketing their already-brilliant amps. Vox quoted the AC15 as 'the first amplifier designed specifically for the electric guitar', a daring 'embellishment' of the truth. Even so, the Shadows asked for more volume, akin to the early 25W Fender that Marvin had experimented with: and even 17 watts wasn't enough for the rockin' Hank. An initial idea of using two AC15s was rejected, so Vox developed the AC30, launched in 1959.

David Petersen remembers, 'Tom Jennings actually vetoed the release of the AC30 for a long time after it existed in the development stage. Tom didn't think anyone would buy anything that "big". He and Dick Denney had huge arguments about introducing the Vox AC30, long after Dick had been "bullied" into building it by the Shadows.

'But the Shadows threatened to go to Fender if Vox didn't do something. The Shadows could have done that – they weren't contracted to Vox and were only really using the amps because they'd been given their first ones free of charge. It was above board, no bribery, I should add – they were just given amps to see if they liked them. They did, and they used them. And when the model was superseded or bands were finished with them, they were taken back by Vox.'

The AC30 was a 30W model with twin 12" speakers and EL84 output valves. Hank's amp was modified with a treble booster to provide a cleaner sound at high volume levels, and this model was later branded as the AC30 Top Boost.

The Shadows were never 'British Invasion' stars – *Livin' Doll* had snuck in to #30 in the US in '59, but as Cliff Richard and The Drifters. But Marvin's men were hugely influential in their homeland, and before too long, any wannabe guitar star wanted to know what guitar – and amplifier – Hank played.

1965
At the Who's request, Marshall start building their 100W stacks, with two 4x12" speaker cabinets

1967
Vox cease valve amp production. At California's Monterey Festival, Jimi Hendrix plays through Marshall stacks, The Who's Pete Townshend uses (solid-state) Vox Super Beatles. The Who soon switch to Sound City (later called Hiwatt) amps. Laney Amplification founded

1968
Orange build their first amps. In 1969, Fleetwood Mac use Orange amps on their USA tour. Hiwatt-branded amps debut

1969-1970
Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page starts playing custom-made Hiwatts. *Black Sabbath* album is released, with Tony Iommi using Laney amps

The great Dick Denney of Vox

'Sound of the longhairs'! A 1964 Vox AC30 combo

Vox meets the Beatles... and the Rolling Stones

Vox soon wooed the Beatles and... bingo. Like Hank Marvin and company, the Beatles had used Selmer amps early in their career, but switched to Vox AC15s, then AC30s. Why? Voxes sounded great, but the Fab Four, like the Shadows, also got their Voxes on what was called 'promotional loan'. Beatles manager Brian Epstein promised Vox that if his rising band – then 'broke', according to Epstein – were loaned the amps they needed, they would never use another brand. It also helped that Vox had a singular look.

'Epstein was very much about image,' recalls David Petersen. 'He'd tried different clothes on the Beatles, and that sensibility extended to equipment... even the amps had to be a part of the Beatles' onstage image. They needed to look smart, and Vox helped make a good job of that.'

The Beatles did use other amp brands, occasionally, but when they exploded into a global phenomenon on TV and live, there were always Vox amps at the back. As teen screams got louder, the Beatles also demanded more power, sometimes with ad-hoc engineering.

The late Dick Denney told author Andy Babiuk in the book *Beatles Gear*, 'I made up the first Vox AC50 using an AC30 cabinet with two 12" speakers plus a "horn" speaker for more top end. The horn didn't fit, so I cut a hole for it in the back of the cabinet. I didn't have the time to make up a new cabinet, because we had to get [the Beatles] new amps. There was always a rush.'

The Vox/Beatles relationship culminated in the AC100 guitar head and cab (and similar for Paul McCartney, technically a modded T60), developed again specifically to suit John Lennon and George Harrison's volume needs for a frenzied crowd. The amp became known in the USA as the 'Super Beatle'. Notably, though, the Super Beatle amps were solid-state, not valve, and Vox's USA operation was calling the shots.

But ever savvy, Vox had also previously got the Rolling Stones onboard. In '63-'64, Keith Richards and Brian Jones extensively used Vox AC30s – Jones was even playing a Vox 'Teardrop' guitar. Bill Wyman had Vox Foundation bass amps and, later, his own signature Wyman bass, and the violin-shaped Vox Astro (as used in the *Rock And Roll Circus* film). Add the Hollies and the Animals, and by the mid-'60s, Vox was the amp sound of 'The British Invasion'.

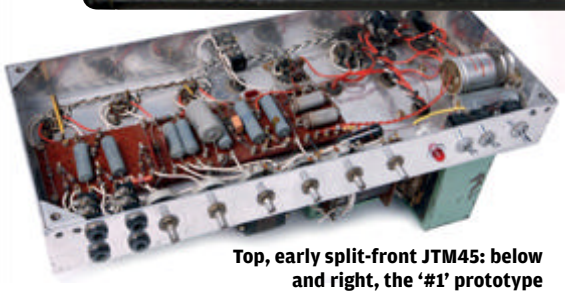
However, Jennings had sold the Vox name to a US franchise in 1964, and things began to change. David Petersen opines, 'For a few years, the American perception of UK amps was purely Vox. But Vox stopped valve amp production completely around 1967. Bang. Vox USA were convinced Fender's then-move to solid-state amps was the way forward. That's when Vox lost the plot completely. Few people thought, at the time, that transistor amps couldn't be made to sound like valves. But musicians were very quick to realise the difference. That said, there were good transistor Voxes. Vox Super Beatles are still being used, notably by Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, and other '60s-inspired bands. But, by and large, US Voxes of that era are pretty dead-sounding things.'

Marshall Lore

Even before they stumbled, Vox weren't the only rising British amp company. In 1962/'63, Dudley Craven, working with Dick Findlay and later Ken Bran developed a new, Bassman-influenced amp. Jim Marshall was a drummer – he already liked loud – and offered to sell the amps through his shop, later bringing the operation in-house. Marshall's earlier amplifiers were equipped with a pair of 6L6 valves, followed by 5881 and KT66s. Initially, the amplifiers were sold only as head cabinets, with optional matching speaker cabinets sold separately. Many variations, head and combo set-ups followed over a relatively short time as rock took over.

The most famous early combo, now, was the 2x12" Marshall JTM45 played by Eric Clapton when he was with John Mayall's Blues Breakers on the 'Beano' album. Marshall did themselves no favours with their nomenclature – many amp names are 'boring', but Marshall's were/are baffling. The amp Eric used was, technically, a Model 1961 which was essentially the lead version of the Model 1987 JTM45, all made in 1964 or 1965. Marshall may not have had much marketing smarts – even now, you have to realise what you might be buying – but they had/have super-tone. Clapton's 'Beano' sound became legendary, yet it was, again, a perfect US/UK

Parks, Narbs and Marshalls: inside the Marshall museum



Top, early split-front JTM45: below and right, the '#1' prototype

marriage – some classic US blues songs, some 'UK blues' originals, all powered by a Kalamazoo-built Gibson Les Paul and the UK's own Marshall amps.

The Who were key to Marshall's amp development. Pete Townshend was an early user of Marshall's 50W JTM45s, but he soon wanted more volume. Townshend went to Jim Marshall and asked for a four-valve 100W model. He also demanded a huge 8x12" speaker cabinet. Jim Marshall related, 'I told Pete his roadies were going to kill him, but he said, "They get paid!"'

Marshall only made six of these 8x12" cab behemoths, four going to the Who and two to the Small Faces. Townshend used them for a while, before suggesting Marshall split the eight speakers into two 4x12" cabs. By 1965, at the Who's behest, Marshall were building the 1960A (angled-front top 4x12" cab) and 1960B (flat-front bottom 4x12" cab). The instantly-recognisable Marshall stack we know today was born.

Typically, Townshend had changed amp allegiance by 1967. 'I tried Marshalls for a while because we always had a very friendly relationship with that firm but I never really used them. Everybody else did – Eric, Jimmy Page and Jeff [Beck], and Jimi Hendrix when he came over used Marshalls. I never got on with them. I don't know why.'

Jim Meets Jimi

It was another artist who helped Marshall amps crack the USA – James Marshall Hendrix. London-based Jimi was a regular visitor to Jim Marshall's shop. Jim Marshall recalled, 'During the mid '60s a lot of well-known and up-and-coming guitarists used to visit me and see me at my music shop in Hanwell, West London, but there's one particular visitor that I'll never forget. His name was James Marshall Hendrix and he quickly became the greatest ambassador my amplifiers have ever had.'

Jim loved Jimi. Jimi loved Jim. Amp 'druids' may even suggest it was all about the shared name, but Hendrix himself said, 'Meeting ↦

FORM VS FUNCTION

How the Vox and Marshall design ethos differed...

Of the early big brands of British guitar amps, Vox and Marshall ruled the roost – but, at first, the companies approached their designs very differently. David Petersen engineered for both companies in the '60s and beyond, and has an insider's view on why the original brands contrasted...

'Their designs were from opposite poles, really,' says Petersen. 'Vox amps revolved around style – a consistent look across the range. Vox were probably the first company where an external design came first: then, amp engineers would have to work out what you could fit inside it. A classic case in point is the Vox AC30. That design even drove the choice of output valves. Vox couldn't fit EL34 valves inside the design. It was a guy called Ian Duncan, from an outside design agency, who designed the look of Vox... and then you just had to cram everything in. It was form over function.

'Marshall, on the other hand, was very much a function-led design. Marshall had taken a Fender Bassman chassis and put the valves, shall we say, the right way up... instead of "bat hanging". And that was the JTM45. Designed from the inside-out, rather than a Vox ,which was outside-in. It made Marshalls much bigger.

'But, in my opinion, that's why Vox always looked much more elegant than Marshall. Even a Vox piggyback amp had a clear visual statement, between the two halves. That's why Brian Epstein liked Vox for the Beatles.'

1964 'Bluesbreaker' and the LP that gave it the name

'Marshall went over to EL34 valves because they couldn't get hold of enough 6L6s – but it gave the amps their own sound'

Jim was beyond groovy for me. It was such a relief to meet someone who knows and cares about sound. I love my Marshall amps. I am nothing without them.' Jimi generally used Marshall 1966 JTM45/100s and 1982A and 1982B cabs – see what we mean about those baffling names?

In a weird twist of British amp history, The Who and Hendrix were both booked to headline 1967's Monterey Pop festival. They tossed a coin to decide who would follow who. The Who 'won', as they didn't want to follow Jimi anyway: too much to live up to. But they 'lost' eventually, as Hendrix delivered a bravura performance – with a Strat-burning topping it all, and with Marshall amps there for all to see. Pete Townshend had by then stopped using Marshall amps: at Monterey, he played through a rented set of Vox Super Beatles. Why? Because by then the Who's backline was so massive, they couldn't afford to ship it around the world. Although the Who cemented their USA rep at Monterey, they sounded, to some, anaemic compared to Jimi. A British invasion? Kind of... but it was Seattle's James Marshall Hendrix who 'sold' Marshall amps to America.

One Louder? One Heavier?

By the late 1960s, British amps were a major business. Sound City wooed the Who, who changed gear with regularity. Sound City's L100 100W amplifiers were used by the band in 1968 – but the Sound City name was just a brand for the London store of the same name. The 'real' brand was perfectly titled: Hiwatt. Ever changing amps, Pete Townshend was an early Hiwatt champion. Jimmy Page (who had his custom-built) and Pink Floyd's David Gilmour also play Hiwatts, even now.

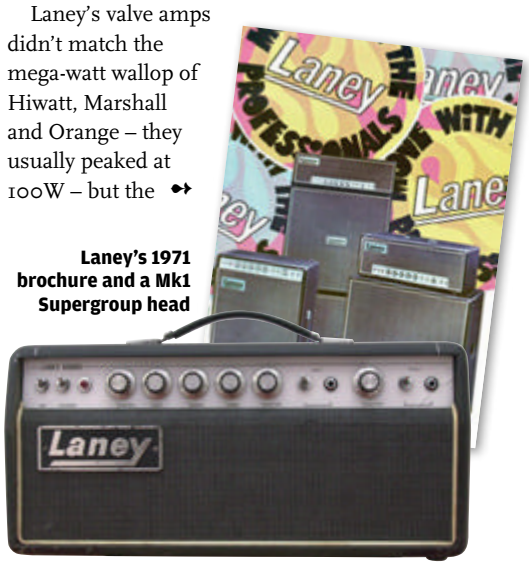
In 1968, Orange debuted their visually-unique designs, perfectly in tune with swinging London, and British makers were soon involved in a power battle. Marshall built the 200W 200 (which from '68 became known as the Marshall Major.) Its nickname? The 'Pig'. Deep Purple's Ritchie Blackmore was a regular user.

Orange/Matamp and Hiwatt also rolled out 200W heads. Hiwatt even had the DR405 400W bass head, with six KT88s, four EEC83s and an ECC81 and notoriously-huge Partridge-designed transformers. Did all this wattage make things twice, or four times as loud? Not really. But such power did deliver clarity, punch and a brutal practicality.

David Petersen says, 'Dick Denney at Vox considered 30 watts to be loud enough for anyone. But watts became important, because bands had 1000 screaming girls and couldn't hear themselves. A good problem to have! But I should say that power is not as significant, to sound, as anyone might suppose. For example, a Vox AC15 is almost as loud, in dB, as an AC30.'

Then there was Laney. Birmingham's Lyndon Laney had rock connections – he was a bassist for The Band Of Joy featuring Robert Plant and John Bonham – but after he started building amps in his father's garage (from 1967), he soon had another Midlands maestro who has become synonymous with Laney backline: Black Sabbath's Tony Iommi.

Laney's valve amps didn't match the mega-watt wallop of Hiwatt, Marshall and Orange – they usually peaked at 100W – but the ➔



Laney's 1971 brochure and a Mk1 Supergroup head

UK VALVES VS US TUBES

How the 'British Amp Sound' was born of necessity

The sound of an amp is dependent on myriad factors: wood (in a combo or stack), wiring, speakers, transformers, capacitors, and so on. In many ways, amps are much more complicated than electric guitars, but the true 'amp-head' player tends to focus on the valves, and 'the British Sound' of amps was, says David Petersen, possibly an accident...

'For a long time, it was hard to get hold of American valves in the UK,' he explains. 'The US military commandeered a lot for communications technology. You couldn't find American Sylvania, RCA or GE-branded tubes easily in Britain. That's why Marshall used the EL34s – European-produced, easily available and relatively cheap... although Marshall started with 5881s, used on the JTM45 that Pete Townshend used.

'But Clapton's "Beano" JTM45 was a funny one, as it used KT66s – a British copy of a 6L6. The 6L6 wasn't the whole reason for his sound, but it certainly contributed. American 6L6s and EL34s respond differently, but the reason Marshall went over to EL34s was because they couldn't get hold of enough 6L6s. So it was maybe an accident, in some ways. But it gave Marshall their own sound as opposed to a sub-Fender sound.'

The irony of it all? The classic American RCA 6L6 tube is a descendant of the 'Harries Valve', developed by British engineer J Owen Harries in 1935.

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sound of *Black Sabbath* (1970) showed they certainly sounded heavier than hell. Indeed, as the '60s rolled into the '70s, British amps – and bands – were all over the world's stages. Fleetwood Mac had their Orange Matamps, the Who their Hiwatts, Free's Paul Kossoff his Oranges and Marshalls, Jimmy Page his Oranges, Hiwatts, Voxes, Marshalls and Selmers, Tony Iommi had his Laneys, and so on. British-made guitars were rarely seen, but British amps had seemingly conquered rock. It endured, too. That classic EVH snarl of *Van Halen I* (1978)? It's a Marshall 2203 amp.

Still Loud And Proud

The British amp allure hasn't faded. In the modern hard rock/metal arena, Slash and Zakk Wylde are just two 'up-to-11' Americans dedicated to their Marshall tone. Wylde reckons: 'What does a Marshall sound like? Strength, warmth, commitment, beauty and destruction. All wrapped in a giant f***ing wrecking ball!' We'll take that as a recommendation, Mr Wylde.

More than 40 years on, Tony Iommi is still collaborating with Laney on signature-wired valve amps built in the UK. Noel Gallagher blends Vox, Orange and Marshall tones. Yet the industry has certainly changed. Vox struggled in the '70s and '80s and are now owned by Japan's Korg Corporation – making amps in Vietnam and China, not in Dartford. Hiwatt faded too – for a while it was just a 'brand' – but since 2013 Hiwatts are wholly British-owned and built.

Newer guitar stars still can't get enough of the 'British sound', however you define it. Noted tonehound Joe Bonamassa has scores of amps – classic Fenders, rare '90s Dumbles – alongside his 270-plus guitars. But his Marshall Silver Jubilee series 2555 100W head, from the late '80s, is his key to the blues-rock highway.

'The Jubilee is always on,' Bonamassa said, when paying tribute to the late Jim Marshall. 'It's the base of the sound. Marshall has defined the sound of so many guitar players. They're still made in the UK and they want to keep it that way. And that's such a testament to the Marshall family in these times.'

Sound City head, the classic underdog, plus a 1972 Hiwatt AP200

Yet not even the 'same' British amp will always give you a uniform sound. You couldn't imagine two more different guitar stylists than Queen's Brian May and U2's The Edge, but they have one thing in common – vintage Vox AC30s, from '63 and '64 respectively. As Edge's tech Dallas Schoo remarks, 'That Vox AC30 is probably more important to Edge than any guitar.'

1973 Orange reverb unit

The British Amp Legacy

Maybe UK amp makers excelled – and do to this day – because they specialised. Fender, Gibson, Gretsch and others in the USA made guitars as well as amps; in the UK, Vox sold Vox-branded guitars, but at heart they were amp makers. Marshall, Hiwatt, Orange, Laney and the rest also didn't bother with things they didn't really know. These famed British companies were/are all about amps. And the legacy continues to this day. Smaller companies such as Ashdown, Blackstar, Cornford, Hayden, Lazy J and many others continue in the UK to try and perfect the perfect amp. The message seems to be – if you want loud, want tone and want style, then you want to buy British.

Thanks to David Petersen, co-author (with the late Dick Denney) of The Vox Story. Petersen is currently completing an updated edition

DEFINING THE BRITISH AMP SOUND: U-CURVES AND BELL-CURVES

It's strange, but most players will have an opinion on whether an amp sounds 'American' or 'British'. Over the years, many brands have evolved to blur lines, but David Petersen has a theory on the early demarcation.

'It's complex, and incredibly hard to define, as your readers will know!' he laughs. 'But, to me, the classic American sound is predicated on 90 per cent clean of the amp's spectrum. Classic American amps, like Fenders, tend to be used in a non-overdriven context. There are many exceptions, of course, but Fenders tended to be used for clean playing. Classic British amps go into distortion earlier, and the sound is more middle-heavy, as it were.

'Middle-heavy amps don't sound as good clean. The side-effect of that is a classic British amp will overdrive much more satisfactorily. Overdrive a classic Fender and it sounds harsh and flappy, or fizzy... and overdrive in the bass and treble sounds horrible. Overdrive is down the middle, as on a Marshall, and it sounds more musical, more sustained. The speaker's not so stressed.

'To visualise this, a Fender amp's response has a sonic "U-curve". Fender amps are engineered that way – you just can't get it out. That's why a lot of players use pedals like Ibanez Tube Screamers with Fender amps – it puts the middle back into the sound.

'In contrast, a British amp's response has more of a "bell curve". With a "bell curve" response, it goes up in the middle when you push the amp. For that Hendrix-y overdriven sound, that's why British amplifiers are much preferred.'

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T-Birds ARE GO

The glorious growl of Martin Turner's Gibson Thunderbird powered the melodic rock of Wishbone Ash. **Lars Mullen** hears about the band, the basses, the breakups, and more

Say the words 'Wishbone Ash' to anyone, and they'll shoot back with 'Ah, great harmony lead guitars' – yet let's not forget, this classic British rock band was constructed upon the musical bedrock of founding member and bassist, Martin Turner. 'We weren't the first band with dual harmony guitars, not by a long shot,' says Martin today. 'We did pioneer the way in a rock band context, though. I remember talking to Phil Lynott in the early days of Thin Lizzy – he said we had the sound he wanted, and I recently read Iron Maiden were heavily influenced by *Argus*.

'As the bass player, constructing the harmony guitar parts seemed natural to me. I would sing one melody guitar line, then add the next using either thirds or fifths so the two guitarists knew what to play. We had a few guitar players come and go, and when Laurie Wisefield replaced Ted Turner in 1974, he found it odd that a mere bass player was teaching him the riffs!

'When both guitars were in full flight there wasn't a guitar left for the rhythm part, so I would often fill the gap by playing chords or a two-string boogie... as on *Jailbait* from '71's *Pilgrimage*. You need strong wrists for that!'

Wishbone Ash began in Torquay in the late '60s as a three-piece called the Empty Vessels with Martin, his brother Glenn on guitar, and Steve Upton on drums. 'We were a bit psychedelic,' Martin remembers. 'We had a backline of Vox AC30s all painted white, and I had this homemade bass sprayed up and fitted with a Framus pickup, which cost me a fiver.

'In '69 we turned pro and relocated to London, but Glenn decided to leave. We auditioned just about every guitar player in London, but we weren't happy with any of them as they needed to sing and play rhythm and lead. So we had a re-think and said, why not get an extra guitarist who can do all that, and let's develop the lead guitar sound. We decided on Ted Turner' – no relation – 'and Andy Powell. Both had done the auditions and we'd let them go, but when they played together, it just worked. We changed our name to Wishbone Ash, and started writing songs featuring twin harmony lead lines... and it became our signature sound.'

The new line-up set about getting a deal with the help of manager Miles Copeland, later of Police fame. 'We got a support slot opening up for Deep Purple at Dunstable Civic Hall and I spotted Ritchie Blackmore checking us out from the side of the stage,' Martin recalls. 'He apparently raved about us to producer Derek Lawrence, who later produced *Hush*. Derek came down to Miles' basement in St John's Wood, near Abbey Road, where we were rehearsing. He loved us, and said his pal – the head of A&R at MCA in Los Angeles – was looking to sign bands. Luckily we'd just done a decent recording, so he took it to LA. We had to pay half his airfare – £150,

Gear

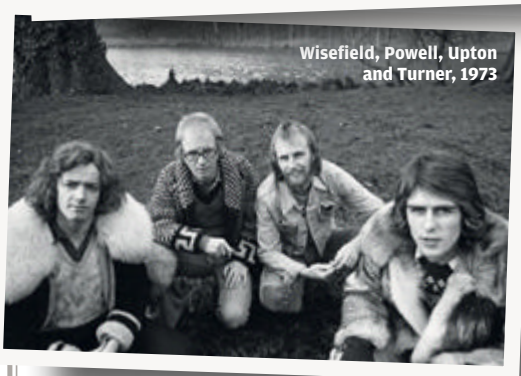
Basses
1965 Gibson Thunderbird IV, Orville Thunderbird reissue

Amps
Martin uses the neck pickup only but sends it through two amps – recently a Hartke head for clean lows and an Ashdown rig for overdrive

Effects
Blackstar OD pedal

Turner with trademark T-Bird and his Ashdown/ Hartke rig

Photo: Lars Mullen


Wisefield, Powell, Upton and Turner, 1973

which nearly broke us – but it was worth it, as he came back with a serious record deal. Derek also did a very good job producing three of our albums, *Wishbone Ash*, *Pilgrimage* and *Argus*.'

Martin's homemade bass had to go. 'They kept getting me basses that I just couldn't get comfy with,' he sighs. 'On *Wishbone Ash* in '71 I played a Fender Jazz, which can sound a little clicky – no good to me as I've always used a pick, and I'm quite physical as a player.

'About halfway through recording *Pilgrimage* my guitar tech said I really should try a Rickenbacker. Derek Lawrence got on the case and had one sent over from the USA. When it arrived he kept telling me that it was a special one as it was "longer than normal". So I'm quietly thinking "what's he talking about?" – it just seemed to be a really cool Ricky 4001 Stereo in a deep burgundy finish with the chequerboard body binding and toaster pickups. It didn't register at the time, but Derek actually meant it had an extra fret. There's a YouTube video with me using it on a track called *Vas Dis* on *The Old Grey Whistle Test*, and if you hit pause, you can count 21 frets instead of 20. I've searched the forums and talked to the guys at Rickenbacker, and it seems it was a very rare guitar. During '68 -'72, a few rogue employees built 13 models with an extra fret and moved the tailpiece up around a centimetre to compensate for the scale length. I'm convinced that it took the classic Rickenbacker sound to a new level.

'I used that guitar on the whole of the *Argus* album, the one which really gave us international success. The twin guitars are amazing and the bass has this very distinct sound. We were delighted when *Sounds* and *NME* voted it Best Rock Album of the year and Top British Album in 1972. I could really make that Ricky snarl and growl... it was beautiful, but sadly its demise came after a gig in Holland. It was in a flightcase, but when I opened it up, I could see the neck was snapped. I was heartbroken. Back in London I left it in Miles Copeland's office intending to have it repaired, but when I got back from the next tour it had disappeared. So I'd like to hear from anyone who has an early '70s 21-fret 4001 in burgundy with a repaired headstock!'

With shows looming, help came from Pete Watts of Mott The Hoople, who offered the loan of a sunburst '65 Gibson Thunderbird, and Turner took it out on tour without really looking at it. 'I realised it was a disaster – we couldn't set up the intonation, let alone tune it. I rang him up and he apologised. Part of their act was to throw the bass skyward and catch it; one time he didn't, and it had smashed into 13 pieces and had been glued back together by the road crew. So I called Pete and offered to buy it and take it to a good repair guy, but he said that it wasn't for sale, just on loan. I said "Well, you obviously don't want this huge wad of new crispy banknotes I have in my pocket for you". The phone went quiet, and then he invited me around to discuss it! I'd already checked with Mick Ralphs who said Pete was broke, so we did the deal at £250, which I thought was pretty good.

'I took it to the best guy I knew, Sam Li in London's Chinatown. He was a little odd... he would sit you down and interview you for an age before he decided if he would repair your guitar. I must have passed the test. The headstock was so badly splintered that he virtually built a new one and grafted it back on, and as the body was so badly dinged that I decided to have it sprayed white. It became my flagship bass, and I've gigged and recorded with over the last 40 years.'

Martin also used other basses – something that fans have not always realised. 'We were touring the USA and this guy who was very enthusiastic about Wishbone kept turning up and talking about my sound. When we were in his hometown he invited us to a huge party at his house and got real heavy about my playing. He showed me a bass rig and a Thunderbird he'd bought to get the exact sound I had on the *There's The Rub* album. But when I said I hadn't used a T-bird, I'd used a Precision, he went psycho on me! I looked at Laurie Wisefield and said, "Time to go!"'

We've all heard the stories from the early '70s when you could cherry-pick old guitars from American pawnshops, and Martin bought his share. 'I've owned so many cool guitars. In the '70s we were always into ➔

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Ray Hatfield, Danny Willson, Martin Turner and Tim Brown

guitars and would visit music stores and pawnshops to see what was about. There were old archtops and late '50s and '60s Fenders and Gibsons hanging all over the walls. I remember Paul Hamer, the founder of Hamer guitars, coming to several of our shows with a truck full of used Fenders and Gibsons, and he convinced us they would be valuable in years to come. We weren't exactly naive about it... we all had a good knowledge of guitars. If they were old we knew they would probably be played in and sound okay, but the vintage trend hadn't been invented, and we shrugged a little at things like worn '50s Strats and Teles. But we were touring and gigging well with our pockets stuffed with $100 bills, so yes, we did buy a few... and some I sincerely wish I still had.'

The Wishbone Ash backline played a major part in the band's sonic history. 'I've used all kinds of bass amps down through the years. We originally used Orange and Matamp after meeting up with Mat Mathias, a longstanding British amp manufacturer; Matamp was the forerunner of Orange. We didn't really want that controlled distortion a Marshall could offer, as we had a fairly clean lead guitar sound so we had to be really accurate with the lead work. The Orange amps had great clarity and headroom. There were hardly any decent guitar overdrive pedals around that suited us, so any overdriven lead guitar was the natural saturation of the amp, and that was at one hell of a volume!

'I used a 200W Orange bass head which I adored until we played Hornsey Town Hall. This place had a raked stage and the amp was on top of a pair of huge cabs... it fell off and nearly knocked me out. The road crew were great and came to the rescue. They hated those early Oranges – they sounded wonderful but they had to be dismantled every second show to re-bias the massive valves, which proved a real hassle.

'While we spent so long creating our own unique sound, it frequently suffered live because of inadequate club PA systems. In the '70s, more often than not, you got a wall of 4x12" speaker columns and PA amps that just weren't man enough, so the vocals and mic'ed guitar cabs were going through a distorted PA. It's ironic that PA systems have come on leaps and bounds when it comes to power and efficiency, and yet some of the best-sounding guitar and bass amps were built in the '60s. I recall a show we did with Black Sabbath... part of their act was to have the guitar amps cranked through the PA, but you couldn't hear any instruments at all, it was just a wall of sound. Wishbone Ash did benefit as the PA systems got better and better.'

The righteous history of Wishbone Ash has been somewhat soured in recent years by struggles over ownership of the band's name. 'Even though I'm the founder member of Wishbone Ash from way back to '69, in 1998 – unbeknownst to all – original guitarist Andy Powell registered the band's name as a trademark, and we didn't find out about it until 2004. Needless to say we were rather upset because we all felt the name and reputation had been built by the original band and belonged to all four of us.

'Sadly, even though I had never sought to prevent his exploitation of the "Wishbone Ash" brand, Mr Powell objected to my use of 'Martin Turner's Wishbone Ash" and aggressively pursued legal action against me, which I had no option but to defend in court in 2013. Somewhat perversely the judgment upheld Mr Powell's registration, although I was not prevented from using the name as a description of the content of my live show or with reference to my heritage with the classic line-ups of the band – all of which Powell strived to prevent, which would have allowed me, as a founding original member, less rights than a tribute act. I can use the words "Martin Turner" and "Wishbone Ash", but not the apostrophe. What an expensive apostrophe!

'I'm grateful for the level of support shown by the other core members of the band – Steve Upton, Ted Turner and Laurie Wisefield – during this most unpleasant episode, and we're keeping open the option of working together on special projects in the future.'

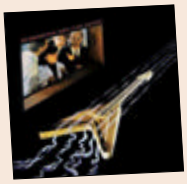
A new CD, *The Garden Party*, serves as a fine souvenir of the day in 2012 when Martin, Ted and Laurie performed a special "thank you" gig for invited hardcore Wishbone Ash fans. As well as that, Martin will soon be issuing a new album, *Written In The Stars*, and is touring under the banner of 'Martin Turner Plays The Music Of Wishbone Ash' alongside Ray Hatfield and Danny Willson on guitars and Tim Brown on drums. 'We're hoping for a release in 2015,' says Martin proudly. 'This band has all the essence of the original... in more ways than one.'

For more information on Martin Turner go to www.martinturnermusic.com

Listen up

WISHBONE ASH
Argus
(1972)
The #1 must-have Wishbone album – a stone-cold classic. After this, head for *Pilgrimage* and *There's The Rub*

WISHBONE ASH
Just Testing
(1980)
Martin Turner's favourite album of the Mk2 WA line-up and something of a hidden treasure with excellent songs, plus great bass and vocals



MARTIN TURNER AND FRIENDS
Garden Party
(2014)
Ted Turner and Laurie Wisefield joined Martin on an outdoor stage for a fan's dream set list of WA songs both well known and obscure

And another thing...

Martin's many outside interests include football, stock car and banger racing, astronomy, and Native American history

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Trans Temporal

Bernard Butler invites *G&B* to his studio to talk of how a guitar inspired his new project Trans and of working with David McAlmont, Ben Watt, and folk legend Bert Jansch. Interview by **Andy Price**

'To handle this guitar, you have to do your hair differently. A little ponytail, maybe... and you've got to wear a waistcoat,' jokes a Strat-toting Bernard Butler. It's an incongruous sight, for Butler will be forever be associated with his iconic cherry red ES-355, a guitar choice that resulted in some of the most influential music of the '90s, from the edgy, raw energy of Suede's initial three-single assault on the charts that, more or less, launched a movement in indie rock that became known as Britpop, to the hugely popular, life-affirming McAlmont and Butler song *Yes*... a single which Butler still regards as his personal highlight.

We're in Bernard's Studio 355 on a cold Friday morning, an impressively decked out but still somehow cosy place that serves as his creative hub and base of operations. First things first; *G&B* must ask... how come, after all this time, a Strat?

'Well, I'd just never had one before,' Butler considers. 'It was very much the '80s guitar – when I was getting started there was the perception that if you played one, you were in Phil Collins' band or something. But I was stuck on the sofa after breaking my leg playing football recently, I couldn't move, and a friend of mine's friend had died and left behind this vintage Strat. His missus wanted to get rid of it, and brought it round and put it in front of me. I spent around six weeks just playing it, falling in love with it and getting attached, and pretty soon I decided that I wanted to keep it.'

The Strat in question is a '62, all original apart from many added coats of paint and a different scratchplate, and Bernard himself set to work on removing as much of the layers of refinish as possible. 'I customised it myself, so I'm quite proud of it,' he says. 'The interesting thing is that with a Strat, you find yourself thinking of yourself very differently – the way you stand and the way you approach playing the instrument all changes. Technically speaking, I wouldn't play the Strat with a tremolo. With the 355 I've always got a bit of tremolo going on, and a bit of reverb and a bit of drive, but with the Strat I'll play it straight, plugged in and very dry. With the single coil pickups there's less sustain, so you have to really work harder.'

'I've found that the best way to play it is to really be quite aggressive with the rhythm playing. Playing the Strat like that led me on to wanting to form a band where I could play in this newly-developed style. That band eventually became my new band, Trans... and it all stemmed from wanting to play my Strat.'

The new project came together very organically. 'It was all improvisational. We'd have perhaps three days of just us in here, playing non-stop, and then we'd leave it a month and come back and do the same thing again. No-one would say anything – no pre-planning at all. Someone would just start playing and we'd all kick in and start adding to it, evolving it, layering it. We'd record the sessions and listen back. The jams would last around half an hour... or until we ran out of steam. I'd press record the minute everyone was in the room so that every single note was down. I'd then go through the recordings and realise that most of it was utter rubbish! However, there'd be one or two little riffs, melodies or patterns that were really ➔

Gear

Guitars

1962 Fender Strat, 1972 Fender Tele with Bigsby, 1961 Gibson ES-355 with Bigsby, 1961 custom Black Gibson ES-330, 1967 ex-Johnny Marr 12-string Gibson ES-335, 1981 Gibson Heritage, 1981 Les Paul, 1991 Les Paul Standard w/Bigsby, 1971 Gibson J-200, 1965 Fender Duo-Sonic, 1964 Fender Precision

Amps

Lazy J 20; several original 1960s Vox AC30s plus a Vox AC10, AC4 and AC1; WEM Westminster, Watkins Dominator MkII, Watkins Westminster and Dominator; Fender Tremolux, Twin Reverb and Vibro Champ; Mesa-Boogie MkIII, Hiwatt 50, Equestrian Vortexion

Effects

Bernard's pedalboard with Ben Watt includes AnalogMan Juicer compressor, Lazy J Cruiser, Strymon Timeline, EHX Holy Grail, TREX Fuel Tank. He uses George L cables and D'Addario Pure Nickel 10-45 strings

Bernard Butler with Gibson ES-355: 'That guitar's my taxi. It does the job'

Photo: Mike Prior

it costs too much. It's a beautiful guitar that I know people lust after. I use that guitar every single day, and I have done since I bought it in 1993.'

As well as Trans, Bernard has been playing with ex-Everything But The Girl singer/guitarist Ben Watt. 'With Ben, I'm just playing guitar. I've not been involved in the production or the writing, I've just been adding bits here and there. It came at a really nice time when I'd done a lot of writing and production work and was starting to feel a little bit jaded, and when he just asked me to play guitar, I thought "brilliant!"

'He'll sometimes say to me, "You see that chord there? Don't play that". I found that directness so refreshing! 'I've worked with people over the years who would say "but that's my chord, I always play that chord" and get really touchy! I'd rather eliminate these problems during the making of the music. You're a better person and musician for it.

'Ben will use oddly-tuned acoustics and electrics along with a Wurlitzer, whereas I'm just on a standard-tuned electric, maybe dropping the low E to D, and using capos quite lot. My thing with Ben's material is to fingerpick, mainly on the bass pickup. I just developed a sound that would complement his stuff. There's hooks peppered all through the songs, but around them I'm really free to do what I want. I'm trying to emphasise images in the words with little slides, bends and dynamics. The darker moods naturally fall to the deep end of the neck, and the more poignant moments to the other end.'

Butler's fingerpicking is very much informed by the live and recording work he did with the late, great Bert Jansch. 'I befriended Bert quite casually but then we ended up playing a great deal together and doing lots of shows. He was amazing... incredibly technical but also in his own little world when he played.

'It was hard to pin him down with timing and specific things. To play alongside him was quite tricky. Learning his parts was a bit of a waste of time. I learned quite early just to improvise and feel my way around, anticipating where he was going to go next. I did the same thing I'm doing now with Ben – fingerpicking on the bass pickup for the bassy, bluesy sound, and I kept that approach going when I work with different people.

'I've discovered little techniques which act as quite dramatic mood shifts, like sticking on the bass pickup for the more rounded phrases, then flicking down to the treble pickup to bring out sharp jagged notes, and particularly solos. Flicking the pickup selector can be quite dramatic, and you have to aim to switch on the downbeat to make the whole movement musical as well as theatrical. I'll have my little finger curled around my Bigsby most of the time, and the same finger is ready to flick the selector down. I use some subtle roll-offs on the volume knob to force me to pull the notes harder, making the notes more choked and aggressive. That also seems to make the amp work harder.

'It's entirely character technique over virtuosity for me. I look at a simple three-chord movement or arpeggio anyone can play and try and see how I can make the simplest notes you've heard before say

↦

good, or two minutes at the start that were really cool. So I'd be isolating the hooks. Me and Jackie [co-member Jackie McKeown] would sit here and experiment, putting bits and pieces together.

'We all agreed that the primary spirit of Trans is "if we're enjoying it, then great". We don't really care if people dislike it. The whole reason we started was just to get in a room and play.'

Bernard's studio is a treasure-trove of gear, but his ES-355 is still his main instrument of choice. 'That guitar's my taxi,' he jokes. 'If you're a taxi driver you don't sit there thinking how incredibly vintage your taxi is – you just get in every day, and it does the job. If I wanted to buy one of these now I couldn't, because

'It's character over virtuosity, trying to make the simplest notes sound new'

And another thing...

Bernard Butler's main influence when learning guitar was Johnny Marr, now a good friend, and Bernard even has one of his guitars, a late-'60s 12-string Gibson ES-335. 'He gave it to me a while ago,' Bernard explains. 'He used it when recording *Strangeways Here We Come*, and when you play that guitar it even sounds like that album.'

Twenty Years of *Yes*

The year 2014 marked not only the 20th anniversary of Suede's *Dog Man Star*, but also of McAlmont and Butler's glorious, euphoric debut single *Yes*, regarded by many as a high musical watermark of the decade. 'Writing that song with David and pulling it off was such an amazing feeling – and the song itself still makes me really happy,' says Butler today. 'That song gives people a lot of joy. The idea was to make perfect pop.'

So what were the main musical elements that made it such a classic? 'It's a very joyous, positive song, it's got key changes in both the verse and the outro – there's lots of silly musical things all over the place. It's a bit of a riot.

'The song starts in F#, which is odd. I wrote the chorus in A – I was having a conversation with someone around the time I was writing *Yes*, and this guy said that all of the great songs in pop history are A to F#m. So *Yes* has that. It has a lot of what I call "Postcard chords" – chords used by Orange Juice and Aztec Camera, lovely major sevenths. Of course it's also got a massive key change at the end where it goes up to B for the outro. I couldn't be prouder of that song.'

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Photo: Mike Prior

Listen up

SUEDE
Suede
(1993)
Suede's glorious debut featured Bernard's guitar and writing prowess with songs like *Animal Nitrate* and *Metal Mickey*

MCALMONT AND BUTLER
The Sound Of...
(1995)
The duo's first album features gem after gem, with *Yes, This Time* and *You Do* pushing Bernard in new directions

BERNARD BUTLER
People Move On
(1998)
Butler's debut solo album featured the hit single *Stay* and showcased his vocals for the first time

TRANS
Red/Green EPs
(2013-2014)
Showcasing Trans's evolving musical style, the two EPs feature some fascinating music, not least the multi-textured *Jubilee*

BEN WATT
Hendra
(2014)
The collaboration with Ben Watt resulted in *Hendra*, an album which also features David Gilmour

something new, bringing out the emotional content. A lot of Ben's songs are very personal, so I like to bring out that sadness and – in a way – something quite musically dysfunctional. Guitars are mechanical... it's so easy to do this stuff, to make your chords more interesting. A straight A major can be transformed by string bends within the chord, or a little Bigsby, or using fingernails to tremolo the last note.'

Dog Man Star, the remarkable second album from Suede, coincided with the guitarist's departure from the band. Now the dust has settled, how does he feel looking back at the music? 'I'm really proud of *Dog Man Star* – I was proud when I was writing it, I was proud being part of the band,' Bernard says. 'Brett [Anderson] and I were completely united about what we wanted to do. Loads of people have made much better records than me, of course, but I don't think I've encountered anyone with our level of ambition.'

Bernard Butler may be regarded primarily as a guitar player extraordinaire but he's also a multi-skilled man of music, producing and songwriting with a vast range of diverse artists including Duffy, the Libertines, the Cribs and Sophie Ellis Bextor. Right now, though, he's focused on working with a range of new artists.

'There's got to be a reason for me to work with someone,' he says. 'My primary mindset isn't on recording them, it's more to enhance, add or bring something new to the actual song or songs themselves.'

Butler recently reunited with David McAlmont for a string of charity performances at the Union Chapel. 'I hate the word reunion,' he points out. 'David and I never split up, we've played gigs in the interim period. What happened with the recent shows was that I'd just run the marathon and was trying to raise some money, so we decided to play the Union Chapel thinking that we'd sell 300 tickets and it'd be a good laugh – and it actually sold a thousand tickets in five minutes.

'The shows were great fun. It was that rare thing where you go on stage and play a song and you just feel like you're not really playing. We played *Yes* and I looked out at the audience and thought, this is the easiest thing I've ever done... why the hell don't I just stick to this? It was a really beautiful moment. It's a very rare thing to write a song and see people genuinely loving it. That feeling of making someone's three minutes better is unbeatable. That's what music means to me.'

So after McAlmont and Butler's remarkable return, can we expect a third album? 'We actually did record a load of material for the third album after finishing our second record, *Bring It Back*, which were never released. There's loads of great songs there, and they will come out as we get round to it. If the world can't wait, it can't be very good in the first place!'

You can read more of Bernard discussing his approach to production in MusicTech magazine, out now

Bernard's Favourite Boxes

LAZY J 20 AMP **'It's great – I use it when playing with Ben. The maker, Jesse, is amazing – the amps are all handwired. I wanted a new amp to replicate the vintage ones I have which I can't move around. I think as a player you seek out equipment which will complement what you're already trying to do, and the 355 through the Lazy J has defined the sound and technique I've been developing for the last five years or so.'**

LAZY J CRUISER PEDAL **'When I got my Strat I was obsessed with *Sultans Of Swing* for about a week, and this is based on the *Sultans Of Swing* pedal. It simulates the sound of the Lazy J amp, really; when you're on tour you can't hire Lazy J's to use, so I normally use a basic Fender amp and run the guitar through this.'**

EQUESTRIAN VORTEXION **'This might look like a piece of shit, but it's brilliant. It was a originally an old '60s Vortexion mixer that I got for £80 – it didn't have a plug on it, I gave it to a friend of mine , an engineer called Horse, who then kept it for about eight years! When I went round and saw it, he said "I've actually turned it into an amp". The sound is really amazing – it's just got this pure, glammy, Mick Ronson kind of sound. it's a total one-off, but it's very versatile.'**

STRYMON TIMELINE **'It's really great – Ben Watt had one and I found it the most useful delay for storing song titles and exact tempos. My main constant setting is the tape delay with 104ms for a kind of slapback, which gives the tone a sad and nostalgic sound. They're absolutely amazing.'**

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Photo: Mike Prior

KING Blues

Jesse Davey and Jon Amor, back together with their musical brethren in the magnificent, mould-breaking Hoax, talk of gear and how they braved taking on the songs of the great BB King. Interview by **Steve Bailey**

In the early 1990s, most young bands were modelling themselves on the likes of the Stone Roses or Nirvana. Not so four teenagers from a sleepy village in Wiltshire, a group of contrary individuals who chose to immerse themselves in the blues. They swiftly became perhaps the UK's best-loved cult blues outfit, unusual not only for their tender years but also for the vitality and excitement they bestowed on what was then considered a mature player's genre. These days, despite the fact that the Hoax are still relatively little-known in some quarters, their gigs sell out with very little promotion or fuss – and when they launched a pledge project to fund their first new studio album for 14 years, they had the required cash in days.

The Hoax's blues passion originally grew out of a love of Dire Straits, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Dr Feelgood, but this led to a voyage of discovery that took in all the blues originators. Jon Amor and Jesse and Robin Davey were all inspired to take up the guitar, with Rob switching to bass, while Jesse's mate Hugh Coltman came in on vocals, and a short run of drummers culminated in Dave Raeburn. The Hoax was born.

'Steve Ray was our hero to an unhealthy extent. Anything he did, we were going to do'

'It's a strange kind of anachronism, really, that some middle-class white boys in Wiltshire should decide that they loved the blues,' muses Jon. 'I just liked the honesty and the rawness of it. When Rob and Jess got into music I lent them a few albums – I think it was Dr Feelgood's *Stupidity*, and some Stevie Ray Vaughan – and they got the calling as well.'

'On our local scene there were a lot of older blues bands playing sort of Dr Feelgood stuff,' explains Jesse, 'so that was around us a lot at the time. I then got into the rootsy blues like Albert King and BB King, and obviously Stevie Ray Vaughan. It's very expressive music and it just fitted us.' Jon agrees: 'Stevie Ray was our hero... to an unhealthy extent. Anything he did, we decided we were going to do as well.'

That meant Strats strung with the thickest strings that their fingers could bear and blues played with total commitment and an energy that astonished local audiences at that time. 'I don't think people really knew what to make of us when we first started gigging,' Jon recalls. 'There would be these strange kind of expressions on people's faces... they just didn't quite believe what they were seeing. We used to play with our balls to the wall – even in rehearsals, I remember playing for my life. Obviously with two guitar players you get a natural positive kind of competitiveness, which added to it, and because you also had Hugh soloing on the harmonica by then, it was just infectious. It's only looking back with a bit of distance that you realise what an impact we had.'

Even now, Jesse still marvels at how quickly the band progressed from local pub back rooms to international touring band. 'To begin with there might have been five people who would wander in, then we'd play a month later and there'd be 10 people, and then within six months to a year the places were full. We did bigger venues and started getting offered some support slots. I think it may have been at a slot opening for Walter Trout that Mike Vernon came to see us, and he pretty much signed us on the spot.'

Mike Vernon was the man who signed Fleetwood Mac, and he instantly knew these lads had something special. The Hoax were signed to his Code Blue label, and Vernon produced the 1994 debut album *Sound Like This*. Just a few short years after they had first picked up their instruments, the band were touring in Europe and America. After *Unpossible* the band formed their own Credible Records and brought in drummer Mark

Gear

Guitars

Jesse: Custom Shop relic Strat with upside down left-handed neck; '62 reissue Strat, both with Bluebird pickups
Jon: Epiphone Dot, 1992 Strat Plus

Amps

Jesse: heavily modded Fender Super Six and Quad, Kingtone amp
Jon: modded Fender Vibroverb and Hot Rod Deville

Effects

Jesse: onboard Kingtone switch, Kingtone Vintage Fuzz and Octaland
Jon: Tubescreamer, Budda Wah Wah

The Hoax reformed: drummer Mark Barrett, Jesse Davey (guitar), Hugh Coltman (vocals), Jon Amor (guitar) and Robin Davey (bass)

Jon Amor with Epiphone, Jesse Davey and 'Indigenous' Strat and Robin Davey and his Music Man Big Al five-string bass

Photo: Mike Prior

Barrett, but after five years and over 2000 gigs, the band split to explore other projects. Jess and Rob are now based in LA working as award-winning video/film and TV directors, Hugh has forged a solo career in France, and the Jon Amor Blues Group has won many fans on the UK scene and beyond.

For a long time Hoax gigs were rare one-off treats, scheduled only when diaries allowed, but in 2010 they announced the band had officially reformed and they have been touring regularly since. And could an album follow? Jesse decided they would let the fans themselves decide if there was enough appetite for the project by setting up an internet pledge fund. 'There was an incredible response,' he says. 'I think we raised what we needed in just over a week. It was humbling and really quite motivating. It put a bit of pressure on. It was like, "We've got to make an album now and it's got to be good". It was an exhilarating process.'

The Hoax in the '90s: 'We would play with our balls to the wall, even in rehearsals'

One of Jesse's self-built pedals, the Vintage Fuzz

Without a song to their name the band went into the studio in Anaheim, California for two weeks and came out with *Big City Blues*, an explosive collection of songs that proved the fans' instincts to be bang on the money. Jon: 'We would write a song at the start of the day, put some sort of arrangement to it and then hit record, so it was quite intense. There were a few guitar and vocal overdubs but most of it is live, as it happened in the room. We never did more than three or four takes for each song, so it sounds fresh and spontaneous and it jumps out of the speakers. There are times when you feel you are in the room with the band, and I love that.'

The band did take a day or two to make sure they had the best possible sounds before they began work. Jesse – whose conscientious approach to tone has rubbed off on Jon and Robin – has been modding his own amps since the early days, and now he has his own range of pedals, pickups and an amp, available from www.kingtoneguitar.com. His latest triumph is the Kingtone switch, and all Jesse's guitars feature his own Bluebird pickups.

'I can be really nerdy!' he confesses. 'Initially it sprang from changing things – my tube amps would always break down, so I'd fix them, but change little things like capacitors to make it a little bit brighter or a little bit warmer. Then I moved on to messing around with pickups, first rewinding, then making them from scratch. The Kingtone switch basically makes a single-coil sound a bit more like a humbucker as you roll it back – a slightly deeper tone but still with the edge, there's a sort of tubey feel to it. I use it all the time. The first one was built into a guitar pedal, but it made more sense to have it on a guitar. It's a fairly basic passive circuit. I do sell them, and a lot of people say they just leave it on all the time because when you turn it off it sounds really thin.'

A Kingtone switch is built into his white Custom Shop relic Strat. The guitar sports a left-handed neck and was originally built for Mato Nanji, frontman of native American blues-rockers Indigenous. 'I'd been friends with Mato for a long time, and he wasn't using it. I'd pick it up and play it every time I was over, so he eventually gave it to me. I like the neck because it means the low strings are longer, a little bit tighter, a bit more twangy, and the high strings are shorter so they're a little bit looser and easier to bend. It's a bit like having a short scale. For playing blues, it's ideal.'

> *'The Fender Super Six is my favourite amp – like a 6x10" Twin. It's a ridiculous thing'*

Jesse favours Fender amps, but most have been reworked. 'The Fender Super Six is my favourite amp ever. It's a bit like a 6x10" Fender Twin, I guess – a ridiculous thing. I ended up chopping it down to a 4x10" and put EV speakers in it so it's stupidly heavy. It stays in the UK, so for recording I modified a Fender Quad and did my best to replicate the old Super Six for America. I use a Leslie cabinet which I love, it widens your sound. Then for the low end I use the Kingtone amp that I built from scratch. It's based off my Super Six but with a lot more low end and lot more power, so it's a 100W 4x12" monster of an amp. It has 6L6s, so it's quite clean; the Fender is generally the crunchy, distorted sound.'

Davey's Vintage Fuzz and Octaland pedals are all over the record too. 'I began building them because friends asked for them. I do still make them but I would have no life left if I took on all the orders, so I have to turn some down. I probably sell hundreds of pickups over the course of a year. I really enjoy making them, though. It's fun being able to just build stuff and trying to create a tone – sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't.'

Jon stills plays the 1992 US Strat that has served him since the early days with the Hoax, but he ➔

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BRAD WHITFORD OF AEROSMITH WAILS ON HIS EX-DC PLAYING
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Jesse's CS Strat has Bluebird pickups and a special switch to thicken tone without losing bite

Jon's Epiphone Dot with Bigsby has brought a new sound to the band

Robin's three-pickup active/passive Music Man Big Al bass

Photos: Mike Prior

Listen up

THE HOAX
Sound Like This (1994)
Mike Vernon-produced debut was the first of four albums made in five years which earned the band a devout following

THE HOAX
Big City Blues (2013)
The much-anticipated 'comeback' album, a blistering collection kicking off with the raucous *Hipslicker*

THE HOAX
Recession Blues: A Tribute to BB King (2014)
Turbo-charged BB King covers ranging from *Ten Long Years* to *It's My Fault Baby* and much more besides

has recently rebelled against two band traditions and taken to sensible gauge strings... on an Epiphone Dot. 'We were dedicated Vaughan brothers fans, and for us playing a Gibson was going over to the dark side,' he laughs. 'We were all about the Strats. We always used to go for thick strings and a high action just because we liked those big Albert King bends. I think Jess had a 0.62" as his low E at one point! It does give you that lovely chunky rhythm sound and a huge lead sound. I've opened my mind a bit more recently, and I'm enjoying the semi-hollow sound. It's got a real bark and a rawness about it. I fingerpick much more than I used to, and as soon as you start twanging the old Bigsby it instantly sounds cool. I like the snappy sound of lighter strings, but I'm getting ribbed for it, so I'll probably have to go back to something a bit more manly!'

Amor also favours Fender amps, and his old Vibroverb holds a special place in his heart. 'I bought it new about the same time I bought my Strat, but it looks like something out of the '60s. It's been a great servant. It's survived two car crashes, it's bolted together at the sides, but it just keeps going. I had it souped up so it's 100W instead of the original 30W, and it's got McKenzie speakers. I love it! I crank it up – I use a Hotplate to keep the volume under control, but I max it out on the volume and it just sings. I use that along with a Hot Rod Deville which I use mainly for bottom end and a bit more grunt and distortion, where as the Vibroverb gives me the bite I need. Together you get a nice full tone. It's a tough band to find your sound in. Jess has a tremendous big sound which is superb and wonderful to listen to, but it means I have to find different ways of cutting through.'

Such was the success of *Big City Blues* that a new album was required to fulfil demand. *Recession Blues: A Tribute To BB King* started as a slow-burning Jesse solo outing several years back but has now evolved into a true Hoax album. 'We've always written our own songs with the Hoax,' explains Jesse, 'but I loved the idea of picking a bunch of blues songs and creating an album,

> *'A lot of people come along to our gigs for the first time and go, "Oh wow! That's blues, is it?"'*

and BB is one of my favourite guitar players. Rob picked some songs, and we realised that it would fit the Hoax. I've actually got a Gibson Lucille so I was very tempted to use it, but I found my '62 reissue pink Strat did what I needed it to do.

'We didn't want to copy anything. It's an "inspired by" album rather than an attempt to replicate BB's music. I've never sat down and learnt licks, I've always just tried to get a feel of where the playing is coming from. With BB, it would be note bending and phrasing. He has a definite style but he never plays the same lick twice, ever! It's a voice, and he sings with his guitar.'

Jon is of a similar mind: 'I didn't really listen to the originals, I just did what I felt I should do as if it were a Hoax song. It's futile trying to be BB King. I first saw him play on the *When We Were Kings* documentary on the Ali vs Foreman Rumble In The Jungle. I went out and bought the *Take It Home* album, which was the one he did with the Crusaders. I was expecting raw blues guitar but it was actually a kind of a soul album, but it's punctuated with these great BB licks. It's the economy of the notes – you instantly know it's him.'

Many great projects have been graced by Hoax members: the Davey Brothers, Well Hung Heart, the Boom Band... but when they come together there's a spark that brings the blues to life in a way that few can, and their shared mission to keep that treasured music vital is now being put front and centre once again.

'I think that in the UK blues is still struggling a bit to be recognised as anything other than old man's music, which is a shame,' Jon considers. 'People who don't know much about it seem to think of it as miserable and depressing, but it's really quite the opposite – it's cathartic and uplifting... or it should be.

'We constantly battle against those sort of prejudices. It's still important to open people's eyes to the genre. I know a lot of people who come along to Hoax gigs for the first time and come away thinking "Oh wow! That's blues, is it?" That's fantastic. It should make people want to move their butts!'

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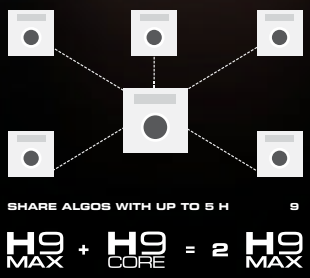

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RHYTHM

EPIPHONE
Lee Malia Les Paul Custom

Taking inspiration from the late-'70s Les Paul Artisan but changing up the pickups, this latest Epiphone makes a very surprising signature model for a Sheffield metal guitarist. Review by **Richard Purvis**

Maybe you haven't heard of Lee Malia, and maybe you're looking at this signature guitar, with its classy walnut finish, gold hardware and florid inlays, and thinking Bring Me The Horizon must be some sort of late-night jazz fusion combo. Check them out, daddy-o – but you might want to knock back the volume a few notches first... or hold the headphones an inch away from your ears. They're quite loud, and really quite yelly.

If you have heard of Lee Malia, then you'll know that Bring Me The Horizon are a melodic metalcore band from the deep south (of Yorkshire). They've been around for over a decade, which is certainly long enough for their chief axe-abuser to have earned a signature model. Malia's guitar style is all about massive, tight, drop-tuned riffing rather than high-speed wizardry – which is good news for those of us who prefer to do our widdling at a urinal. Mind you, BMTH do cover a fair bit of stylistic ground, from the angrily angular to the symphonically lush, so would-be Malias need an instrument that can do much more than just low-down chugging.

The starting point is a good old-fashioned Les Paul. The body is mahogany with a maple top, the glued-in neck is mahogany with a rosewood fingerboard, and the hardware at both ends of the strings is all familiar stuff. The combination of walnut and gold feels warm and sophisticated, in a way that doesn't necessarily go with Malia's own wardrobe, and that's accentuated by the opulence of the pearloid fret markers and headstock patterns – which seem to have been borrowed from the Gibson Les Paul Artisan of the late '70s. There's fancy binding around the headstock and both front and back of the body, while the simpler binding on the neck runs beneath the fret ends.

The one-piece maple cap looks nice but, looking at the guitar from the bottom, we can see the body is made from at least five bits of mahogany. There are no joins visible on the back; it must be a veneer, the cheeky scamps. The heel and headstock have been glued on rather than carved from the same piece of timber as the neck, and generally, while our review guitar came with a loose output socket and some less-than-perfect neck binding, the quality of finish is decent.

It's a heavy instrument with a moderately chubby neck, and the ➔

Lavish binding all around the mahogany body

Even the tuners echo Schallers of the 1970s

Bring Me The Horizon are a metalcore band, and Lee Malia's style is all about massive, tight, drop-tuned riffing

FACTFILE
EPIPHONE LEE MALIA LES PAUL CUSTOM

DESCRIPTION **Limited-edition solidbody electric guitar. Made in Indonesia**
PRICE **£599**

BUILD **Mahogany body with maple top; mahogany set neck with bound 22-fret rosewood fingerboard; tune-o-matic bridge and stop tailpiece, traditional tuners**
ELECTRICS **Gibson USA 84T-LM humbucker (bridge) and P-94 (neck), three-way switch and individual volume/tone controls**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Walnut only**

SCALE LENGTH
629mm/24.75"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 43mm
12th fret 53mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 21mm
12th fret 24mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 35mm
Bridge 52mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 1.5mm
12th fret bass 2mm
WEIGHT **4.3kg/9.5lbs**

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Another limited edition, the blues hero's siggie Epi has Gibson Burstbucker pickups and is now available in Pelham blue
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ESP
Signature Series Will Adler WA-200
ESP seems to have more metal-minded signature models than Gibson does now, including this single-cutaway model for the Lamb Of God guitarist
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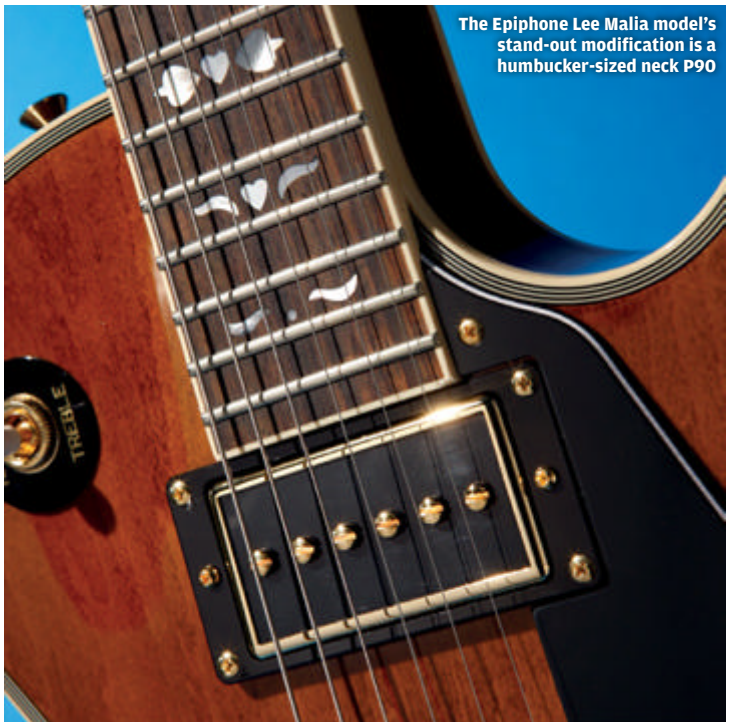


The Epiphone Lee Malia model's stand-out modification is a humbucker-sized neck P90

smooth feel of it in the left hand will appeal to tattoo-less blues players and cruise-ship strummers as much as it does to metalheads. Lee's squiggle on the back of the headstock is the only giveaway if you're more keen on the guitar than you are on the artist – and it really is a squiggle, so if your favourite guitarist is Tang from ZingZillas, you can always tell people it's his, and they'll never know.

Finally, let's have a closer look at those pickups. There's a humbucker at the bridge and what looks like a P90 at the neck – an arrangement that immediately calls to mind Duesenberg, especially with those uncovered bobbins and metal 'frames'. But these are both American-made Gibson pickups: the neck unit is a P-94, basically a standard single-coil P90 with a humbucker footprint, and the one at the back is an 84T-LM. This is not listed on Gibson's website, but assuming those last two letters represent Mr Malia himself, that would make this a specially commissioned version of the 84T pickup that Gibson originally made for the Van Halen-inspired Kramer 84.

Sounds

A good Les Paul has plenty of whump in the bottom end and a sweet click at the top, without too much clanging and scratching in between. Well, it doesn't take long to establish that this – no matter how many pieces of wood it's made of, where it's been built or what it says on the headstock – is a good Les Paul. Going straight into a clean amp in the middle pickup position, we get exactly what we want from a Lester. It's warm and full but not woolly, even on the low E string, and the tone stays solid right up to the 12th fret and beyond. The chiming high frequencies, meanwhile, are sonic tiramisu.

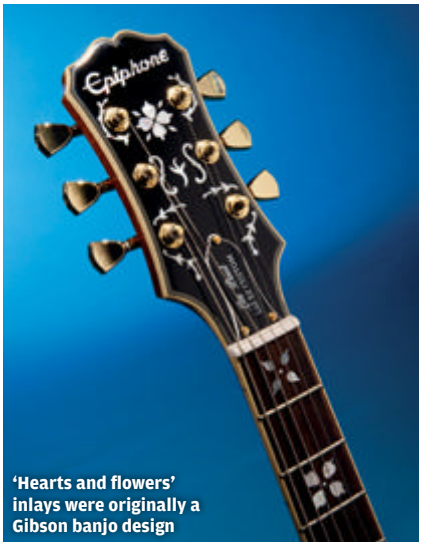
Switching to the humbucker on its own naturally slims things out, but it's still musical and not too wiry – and the P-94 provides the perfect smokey-smooth contrast, as happy on a jazz odyssey as it is taking you down to the crossroads. Surprisingly excellent... and at this point you might well start to wonder if Bring Me The Horizon really are a late-night jazz fusion combo.

Just to make sure they're not, we'll tune to drop C sharp (anything lower starts to feel very baggy with the standard 10-46 strings fitted) and call in some mid-scooped distortion. Now the squiggle on the back of the headstock suddenly makes more sense than the one on the truss-rod cover: this Custom handles fast, low-down riffing with aplomb. Most players will be drawn to the bitey bridge pickup, but the middle position is also able to keep things fairly tight and will provide more gurgling fullness. On a practical note, it's worth noting that the strings behind the nut tend to resonate a lot, so to make those dramatic dead stops count you might need to consider a noisegate.

Now that we're all here – Les Paul, high gain, tinnitus – let's take a little detour up the fretboard. The solidity of the clean tone translates into fat, smooth, screaming lead lines, and the easy playability makes this a great guitar to show off on. Maybe it could even persuade Lee to take a few more solos himself.

Verdict

It would be wrong to call the Lee Malia Les Paul Custom a wolf in sheep's clothing – and not just because that's a terrible cliché. More accurately, it's a sheep in sheep's clothing that can also do fine wolf impressions: it looks like a distinguished old Les Paul and it sounds like one, which is quite a result in itself at this price; but the fact that it's been made for a modern metal guitarist forces us to judge it in those terms too, and it passes the test with ease. There's life in the old sheep yet.



'Hearts and flowers' inlays were originally a Gibson banjo design

Black reflector knobs control volume and tone

FINAL SCORE

EPIPHONE LEE MALIA LES PAUL CUSTOM	
Build Quality	**16**/20
Playability	**18**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Looks	**17**/20
TOTAL	**87%**

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ORANGE

ORANGE

Beginners Electric Guitar Starter Pack with CR12L Combo

Whether starting out or returning to the fold, a starter pack can get you rolling in the right direction. Review by **Marcus Leadley**

There are starter packs, and there are starter packs. These days you can pay anything from £100 to £500 for a guitar and amp package complete with a soft case and an assortment of related goodies, and the high quality of Chinese manufacturing means that even guitars at the absolute budget end of the market play well and sound, within limits, remarkably good. With the lower-cost packages it's often the amp that lets the side down, so the fact that this Orange starter pack features an already existing practice amp, a Crush 12L that you can purchase separately for £75, is very good news. Basically the R&D has already been done to ensure the best possible sound at a nice price – a much better option than a new amp designed specifically to keep the overall package cost down. £229 seems very fair, and there are plenty of deals that bring this down as low as £193. For a functional set up, that really is peanuts.

The version of the pack we've been sent features a bright orange LP Special-style guitar with twin humbuckers, independent tone and volume controls, and a three-way selector. If you prefer, you can have the guitar in white or black. The guitar has a bolt-on neck with what looks like an actual rosewood fingerboard. The 24.75" scale length is the appropriate choice and, all things considered, it feels very nice to play. The fret work is especially good and the fact that the tangs are inset is a surprise – something you'd not normally expect on a budget model. The adjustable tunomatic-style bridge and stop tailpiece are good quality items. Realistically, a hard tail instrument like this is a good option for anyone learning to tune an instrument; whammy bars can be fun, but budget units rarely make a guitar more playable or tuneful. The own-brand tuners have a nice smooth action and, as the package includes a nifty little clip-on digital tuner, there really ↦

Gigbag, clip-on tuner, strap, lead and picks are all included – as is a free online guitar course

The LP Special-style guitar has two humbuckers, a bolt-on neck, quality hardware and especially good fret work

FACTFILE

ORANGE BEGINNERS ELECTRIC GUITAR STARTER PACK WITH CR12L COMBO

DESCRIPTION **Solidbody electric guitar and Crush 12L amp, both made in China. Digital tuner, lead, plectrums, spare strings, guitar strap and soft case**
PRICE **£229**

GUITAR

BUILD **Nato body, maple neck and rosewood fingerboard. Chrome hardware. Tunomatic-style bridge with stop tail**
ELECTRICS **Two Orange humbuckers, 3-way pickup selector, independent volume and tone controls**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Orange, white or black**

SCALE LENGTH
24.75"/629mm
NECK WIDTH
Nut 43.2mm
12th fret 53.2mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 21.5mm
Ninth fret 23.5mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 35mm
Bridge 51.5mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 1.6mm
12th fret bass 2.2mm
WEIGHT **3.4kg/7.5lbs**

AMP

DESCRIPTION
12W amplifier with one 6" speaker, made in China
CONTROLS **Three band EQ (Lo, Mid, High) Volume, Gain, Overdrive. Guitar input and headphone socket**
ACCESSORIES **Guitar tuner, jack cable, guitar strap, gig bag, plectrums, Orange Music Education Rock Guitar Course**

CONTACT **Orange**
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Les Paul Performance Pack
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RRP **$199**

Marshall
Guitar And Amp Starter Pack
A little amp with a big name in rock – and there's an LP-style guitar lurking in the wings too
RRP **£220**

The Crush 12L is a smart, remarkably loud little amp that goes from simple cleans to barking mad rock sounds

is no excuse for being out of tune. While intonation is another thing that lets many low-price guitars down, this one seems fine. Maybe as a review sample it's been 'breathed on' but as all the packaging's intact I'm guessing this is in 'from factory' condition – and if so, well done Orange. If you buy from a shop you could haggle for a set-up, but even if you take your chances online it doesn't look like you'll be disappointed. Acoustically the guitar rings nicely and sustains well.

The Crush 12L is a smart little amp with a remarkably loud voice – more than enough to annoy other family members, flatmates or the neighbours. The Volume, Overdrive and Gain controls are remarkably interactive, and with independent Low, Mid and High controls you can create a spread of tones ranging from simple clean sounds right through to the barking mad mini rock monster sound every novice needs to explore at some point. There's also a headphone socket for those moments when you really want to be loud, but need to keep it down.

Three-band EQ and plenty of gain options

I'm often surprised that Orange amps, no matter what the cost, big or small, always sound like Orange amps. There's an appealing midrange hump that makes them great for blues, boogie and classic rock. The fact that a Crush is the type of amp a more seasoned player might buy as a practical practice option or for a workshop bench (heavens, there's a Micro-Crush on my desk) tells you a lot about the usability of the tone.

Getting a well-defined but lively clean sound is the hardest thing; pairing a budget amp with budget humbuckers isn't likely to be recipe for total success. However, with a bit of tweaking, the neck or twin pickup combination delivers good results. On its own, the bridge pickup is a little too dark for clean strumming – but it's a characteristic that comes into its own when you start to ramp up the gain. For midrange crunch or punky power chords, a good blues-rock solo tone and more aggressive lead voices the bridge pickup delivers very well. If you have the aptitude and dedication to learn and progress this gear will help, rather than hinder, your progress.

One good way to test the potential of lower-cost equipment is to pair it with top end kit. Plugging the Orange guitar into a quality valve amp delivers surprising results. The pickups are still a little dark, but the instrument punches well above its weight. Here, the musicality of the tone controls can be heard, and all up, this guitar has the capacity to grow with you. Paired with an expensive guitar with single-coil pickups the Crush 12L develops a much clearer and coherent voice – so it too may remain a bit of kit you want to hold on to as you progress up the ladder.

Finally, to the added extras. There's a spare set of strings, six (!) plectrums, a tuner and a decent branded strap. The padded soft case has both carrying handles and a detachable shoulder strap, and will get you to school or your mate's house without a problem. Purchasing the pack also allows you to access the beginner's level of the online Orange Rock Guitar Course, which normal mortals will need to pay £14.99 for. Signing up is easy and resources are surprisingly comprehensive with video lessons, audio backing tracks and enough theory content to get you to Grade 3 standard if you work thorough the material diligently. It's all good solid advice presented in a professional way. There's even an exam, if that sort of thing tickles your fancy.

Verdict

It's hard not to be impressed by this Orange starter pack. Not only do you get a lot for your money, but the quality is very good. This guitar will see you through your beginner years, or if you already have some experience then it may come as a nice surprise. Once you start playing seriously with other people you will probably want to upgrade the Crush to something with more power and a more refined tone stack, but it will always be the amp that's easiest to hop on the bus with.

FINAL SCORE

ORANGE BEGINNERS STARTER PACK	
Build Quality	**17**/20
Playability	**18**/20
Sound	**16**/20
Value for money	**19**/20
Vibe	**18**/20
TOTAL	**88%**

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ARTIST: JOE ROBINSON

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ACUS

One For Strings 5 & 10 Acoustic Amplifiers

From a simple acoustic guitar amp to a virtual PA-in-a-box, Italy's Acus is a sound reinforcement company to watch. Review by **Huw Price**

Acus is a small family owned company that was established two years ago. Frederico Canale, the man behind Acus, has over 40 years of experience in audio electronics and started out making amps for Eko back in the 1960s. More recently, he headed up R&D as a co-owner of Schertler.

Acus amps are made and assembled by local craftspeople in and around Recanati in Italy, and the attention to detail is apparent. The varnished plywood cabinet of the Acus 10 really caught our eye, along with the bent metal speaker grilles, smart badges and simple but robust metal carrying handles. You can choose between varnished ply or black tolex cabinets, and they cost exactly the same. Although there are no corner protectors, slip covers are available.

The company's mission is to 'produce a sound design that amplifies acoustic sound with clarity, purity and natural tone'. When they say 'acoustic sound' it's not just acoustic guitars. These amps are also intended for violins, cellos, mandolins and more. The cabinets are loaded with multiple drivers and they're bi-amplified like active studio monitors to achieve a wide frequency response with a low slew-rate.

The 5 has mic and instrument inputs, but you can't use both at the same time

The designers employ Class A stages in strategic positions of the preamplifiers to simulate the warmer tones of high-end valve amplifiers. Cabinets are built in the Acus custom shop and the loudspeakers are manufactured to Acus' specification with ultra-light responsive cones.

Viewed front on, both these amps really do look more like active studio monitors or expensive PA speakers than regular electro-acoustic amps. Then again, besides a shared design aesthetic, these amps are quite different from one another. The Acus 5 is a tiny, fairly straightforward acoustic guitar amp with an additional mic input, while the ACUS 10 is virtually a complete condensed PA system.

Acus One For Strings 5

Besides the ground lift and power switches on the back panel, all the controls and connections are mounted on the top panel. First up is the XLR microphone input, with an input impedance of 1K ohms; this should ➔

FINAL SCORE

ACUS ONE FOR STRINGS 5	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Versatility	**15**/20
Sound	**16**/20
Value for money	**15**/20
Vibe	**16**/20
TOTAL	**80%**

FACTFILE
ACUS ONE FOR STRINGS 5

SPECS **50W solid state acoustic guitar amplifier with microphone and line level inputs, Aux In, Direct Out and built in reverb effect. Made in Italy**
PRICE **£469**

CONTROLS **Sensitivity (switch), High, Mid, Low, Volume EFF, Volume, Aux In (Switch)**
DIMENSIONS
29cm x 24.5cm x 25cm
WEIGHT **7kg/15.4lbs**

CONTACT
Freestyle Music Ltd
01924 455414
www.acus-sound.it

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AC-60
Stereo acoustic amp with two channels (2 x 30W), mic/line input with phantom powering, auto anti-feedback function, three chorus effects, reverb/delay, switchable guitar channel (magnetic or piezo pickup), tuner output, stereo aux in, stereo XLR outputs, includes bag
RRP **£406**

Ibanez
T150S
Acoustic guitar combo, 150W stereo, volume control, three-band EQ, chorus, reverb, notch filter, master volume control, aux volume control, headphone out with Stereo FX, Line Out, XLR input, AUX in, closed back, tilt-up system
RRP **£338**

FACTFILE

ACUS ONE FOR STRINGS 10

SPECS **350W solid state acoustic guitar amplifier with three mic/line channels and two line level instrument channels; eight reverb FX; headphone, line and direct outputs; phantom power switching, stereo line input and output, sweepable notch filter. Made in Italy**
PRICE **£469**

CONTROLS **Gain, High, Mid High, Mid Low, Low, EFF (send), Volume for all input channels. Resonance (with switch), Vol Line Out, Phones, Stereo Out, High, Low, Stereo In, EFF Return, Volume. PH (with switch)**
DIMENSIONS
46.7cm x 31.cm x 37cm
WEIGHT **14.5kg/31.9lbs**

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AER
Domino 2A
Four-channel acoustic amp, 2 x 60W in mono with 2 x 8" full range speakers plus tweeter; four different digital FX, channel mute, insert link, pre master output. Includes cover
RRP **£1123**

Schertler
Jam 400
All-round amp for acoustic instruments and vocals, 400W, 1" tweeter and 2 x 8" speakers, bi-amping, 3 x mono/2 x stereo channels and CD/Aux input, 3-band EQ and effect controls for each channel, anti-feedback, mono channels with XLR input and phantom power, RCA output, XLR DI output, FX processor, FX loop
RRP **£940**

interface quite nicely with any low impedance dynamic microphone with a balanced output. Next up is a jack socket for line input. With an input impedance of 470K ohms it's optimised for high output instrument, so you'll need an electro-acoustic with an onboard preamp to use the ACUS 5, or you could plug an external preamp between a passive pickup and the Acus 5. Unfortunately you can't connect a microphone and instrument simultaneously because plugging into the line input defeats the mic input.

Labelled Normal and Hi Sens, the sensitivity switch helps the Acus 5 to interface with a variety of different input sources. Equalisation controls provide plus and minus 15dB adjustment in the High, Mid and Low frequencies, but there's no centre detent. You can probably guess what the Volume control does, and the Volume EFF blends the on board reverb effect into the dry signal.

An auxiliary audio source can be connected via the 3.5mm mini jack socket, and it also has a dedicated volume control. Lastly there's a balanced line out jack socket to allow you to connect the Acus 5 to a PA system or to a second amplifier.

The five-channel control layout is daunting but is actually easy to use

Sounds

Acus have concentrated on sonic quality rather than superfluous features. The 5 does have a very slight colouration in the midrange that we weren't quite able to remove with the EQ controls. In a sense it's comparable to the way that restricted speaker enclosure size can colour small electric guitar amps.

Other than that, it's impressive stuff. The tone is crisp and clear with no discernible distortion and ample low end response. Although you're restricted to just one reverb, it's voiced well for acoustic guitar, adding a 3-D quality without swamping definition. Transient response is fast and natural, and we were able to dial up pleasing electro-acoustic tones very quickly. It's also surprisingly loud, so pub gigs are well within the Acus 5's capabilities.

Acus One For Strings 10

The One For Strings 10 is the largest Acus, and it's designed as 'an all-in-one five-channel solution for small ensembles as well as solo performers'. It's a scaled-up version of the Acus 5, with three drive units and a maximum power output of 350W . It measures 47cm x 32cm x 35cm and at 14.5kg it's a reasonably comfy one-handed lift.

The first three channels have XLRs for mics plus line level input jacks. Channel 4 has two line level inputs labelled L and R plus a three-way switch that configures the response for viola and cello, acoustic guitar and semi-acoustic guitar. The last channel is a dedicated acoustic guitar channel.

All five channels share the same layout. From let to right there's Gain (with overload light), High, Mid High, Mid Low, Low, EFF and Volume. EFF refers to the effects, which appear to comprise eight shades of reverb. Above the input channels there's a section that loosely corresponds to the centre channel on a typical mixer, with master volume, headphone level, EFF return level and global phantom power switching for condenser microphones.

RCA/Phono sockets are provided for stereo line input and output along with High and Low EQ controls and Stereo In and Stereo Out level controls. Output signals can also be taken from the Line Out jack (unbalanced) and Direct Out XLR (balanced). Lastly, the Resonance control, when activated, applied a 12dB notch filter that can be swept from 100Hz to 250Hz to minimise low-mid frequency feedback.

Sounds

The family resemblance is clear, with the same clear, distortion-free tone and lightning-fast response, but this time the midrange colouration is completely absent. Splitting the midrange control over two frequency bands is extremely effective and, like the Bass and Treble controls, they achieve a lot without sounding at all processed.

Like the Acus 5 the basic sound is encouraging and simple fine-tuning will optimise the response for your pickup system. Rather than being artificially extended, the treble response is sweet and very much in line with the natural tone of an acoustic guitar. Regardless of the pickup systems we used, we couldn't provoke a response from the overload lights, but we did notice some extra brightness when running the Acus 10 with Gain high and Volume low rather than vice versa.

The effects turn out to be eight reverb programs with various decay times and tonal flavours. A bit more variety in reverb tone, in particular the amount of treble content, would have made this aspect even better.

Verdict

These are classy, well-made amplifiers that offer impressive sound quality and useful features. If the Acus 5 seems a bit basic and the Acus 10 is too complex for your needs, then do check out the other Acus products, because there are models in between.

FINAL SCORE

ACUS ONE FOR STRINGS 10	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Versatility	**19**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Vibe	**18**/20
TOTAL	**91%**

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BAD CAT
Unleash

An attenuator and an amp, all in one? Yes, Bad Cat's unique Unleash is all about volume – less of it, or more... or lots, lots more. Review by **Huw Price**

The Bad Cat Unleash is an attenuator, but it's also a 100W Class D amplifier weighing in at a mere 4.5lbs and measuring 5.5" x 5.5" x 7". Essentially it can make loud amps quieter, quiet amps louder and, more intriguingly, bolster your regular sound through an extension speaker.

Setting the unit up is simple; connect the speaker output jack from your amplifier to the Unleash's 8 ohm Amp Input (amps with 4 and 16 Ohm outputs can be used too, but you may notice a slight tonal difference). Next, connect the speaker output of the Unleash to your onboard speaker, or an extension cabinet. You can even do both simultaneously if you use the Unleash's second speaker output.

Alternatively, you can leave your combo's onboard speaker connected as usual and route the signal to the Unleash from the extension speaker output. Set your amp exactly how you like it, and then use the Unleash to send that tone through an extension cabinet with up to 100W of extra push.

There are three controls on the front panel. The best method is to start off with all three fully anticlockwise, then turn up the Input Trim until the green overload light starts to flash. Each channel has its own volume control, so you can pre-set two levels and footswitch between them. Since the Unleash runs completely clean, there's no extra overdrive when the higher setting is selected. There's also an FX loop for time- and modulation-based effects, and a direct output.

Sounds

Switching the source amp to standby demonstrates that the Unleash produces virtually no noise and its cooling fan is silent, so any background noise you may hear will be coming from the guitar amp. A Speakon to jack cable is provided, which is fine for extension

Controls at one end, sockets at the other

cabinets, but combo users may require a female jack coupler. Speakon connectors are sensible because they cannot be pulled out accidentally, but it would be better if a Speakon to female jack cable were included too.

With the Unleash used as an attenuator, you may notice some diminution in treble sparkle and transparency – and we felt low notes lost some snap and pop. These issues are most noticeable with lots of attenuation, and the Unleash sounds far better when less is applied.

Even so, we found the volume boost capabilities far more interesting and impressive. Although treble does seem to increase very slightly along with volume, the Unleash is essentially transparent. It's a bizarre experience when a device that's small and light enough to put in your pedal bag can turn your favourite small amp into a fully-giggable monster with no loss of tone or touch sensitivity.

Verdict

Using the onboard speakers our test combos seemed to sound just the same... but louder. With an extension cabinet they sounded significantly louder, but also bigger and clearer. When you consider the alternatives are lugging around a second amp or going through PA speakers and relying on monitor wedges, the Unleash seems like a no-brainer. It's a unique, practical and affordable product that could finally solve the tone-versus-volume dilemma for legions of small amp fans.

FINAL SCORE

BAD CAT UNLEASH	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Versatility	**19**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**19**/20
Vibe	**18**/20
TOTAL	**92%**

FACTFILE
Bad Cat Unleash

DESCRIPTION **100W Class D amplifier/attenuator with two footswitchable channels, effects loop, direct output & two speaker outputs. Made in the USA**
RRP **£349**

CONTROLS **Input Trim & 2 x channel volume.**

DIMENSIONS
5.5" x 5.5" x 7"
WEIGHT **2.05kg/4.5lbs**

CONTACT **Coda Music**
01438 350 815
www.coda-music.com
www.badcatamps.com

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MC SYSTEMS

NKM Dynamic Drive, LHR Dynamic Distortion, SYD String Reviver & LAX Glass Chorus

Designed near Sydney, built in China, the new Apollo range of effects all come with a unique control feature. Review by **Marcus Leadley**

Presented in a range of muted reds, blues, greens and browns, the eight pedals of the Apollo range from MC Systems look like they mean business; it's hardware with an almost military spec feel to it. What makes them unique? Designer Warren McAlister refers to them as Dynamic Response Pedals; they're true bypass, but when you engage them the amount of effect depends on how hard you jump on the footswitch – and you can adjust the threshold to suit how heavy-footed you are. This adjustment occurs on the underside of the pedal and requires a small screwdriver.

The left hand footswitch, the V-Switch, turns the effect on and off. With the V-Switch on/off mini toggle engaged, the two knobs to the left of the unit become a matched pair of parameter controls, so what you get sonically depends on how hard you hit the V-switch. Which of your presets gets engaged is shown by an LED. The right hand switch (labelled Alternate) allows you to switch between two other presets controlled by the two knobs on the right hand side of the unit... so you have access to four different settings from one pedal without having to bend down and fiddle with any knobs. All very practical and straightforward.

NKM Dynamic Drive

With the NKM the V-Switch controls the Drive setting, the Alternate changes the Level. As well as Drive and Level control knobs you get a Tone control that works across all settings. Setting the sensitivity of the V-Switch is easy, but the useable range seems quite tightly calibrated: the difference between a gentle press and slightly harder footfall and between an average touch and a seriously seismic stamp is a matter of millimetres around the centre point of the adjuster's travel. Once set to your liking, however, you can largely forget about this feature. The pedal is easy to get the hang of and the flexibility if offers is immediately apparent. ➔

FINAL SCORE

NKM DYNAMIC DRIVE	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**18**/20
Sound	**17**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Looks	**18**/20
TOTAL	**89%**

FINAL SCORE

LHR DYNAMIC DISTORTION	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**17**/20
Sound	**17**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Looks	**18**/20
TOTAL	**88%**

FACTFILE

MC SYSTEMS PEDALS

DESCRIPTION **Drive, chorus, distortion and 'string reviver' pedals. Designed in Australia, made in China. 9V external power or internal 9V battery. V-switch sensitivity screw adjuster on underside of pedal. Mono input and output**

NKM DYNAMIC DRIVE

PRICE **£113**
CONTROLS **Drive, V-Drive, Level, Alt Level, Tone, V-Switch Enable (mini-toggle on/off). Two footswitches: V-Switch and Alternate**

LHR DYNAMIC DISTORTION

PRICE **£113**
CONTROLS **Drive, V-Drive, Tone, Alt Tone, Level, V-Switch Enable (mini-toggle on/off). Two footswitches: V-Switch and Alternate**

SYD STRING REVIVER

PRICE **£113**
CONTROLS **Definition, V-Definition, Level, Alt Level, Slope, V-Switch Enable (mini-toggle on/off). Two footswitches: V-Switch and Alternate**

LAX GLASS CHORUS

PRICE **£113**
CONTROLS **Depth, V-Depth, Rate, Alt Rate, Glass, V-Switch Enable (mini-toggle on/off). Two footswitches: V-Switch and Alternate**

CONTACT **sales@mcsystemsmusic.com +852 2131 8319 www.mcsystemsmusic.com**

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RRP **£229**

Rodenberg
GAS-728 NG
There is no direct competition for the SYD String Reviver, but this twin boost pedal has good clean credentials and plenty of tone-shaping to brighten up those dull strings
RRP **£190**

Analog.Man
Bi-Chorus
For those in need of pairs of rate and depth controls and foot-on-the-floor switching, here you go! Swoosh...
RRP **£204**

Creating practical Drive and Level settings is easy, and switching between then is a breeze. The Tone control is nicely musical so you can tweak your basic sound very easily. The actual sound of the pedal is clean and open, and there's very little background noise even at extreme settings.

LHR Dynamic Distortion

Here's a pedal if you want to get seriously nasty. This time the V-Switch controls the Drive level while Alternate allows you to preset Tone, and there's a master Level Control. Given that different Drive levels will have a big effect on your output this pedal is arguably a bit more flexible than the NKM, as the ability to preset Drive and Tone lets you access very different sounds at the touch of a button.

At lower Drive settings the distortion can be made to sound swampy and shambolic with a ragged lo-fi breakup that's great for contemporary Americana. Big rock chord voices can be found around the mid-drive territory and wailing solo tones emerge at higher settings. The master Level control means you can achieve any of these at a mixed and managed volume. The tone control is quite amp-like, giving good bass and treble boost or cut, but you'll need a separate graphic if you want to create more of a scooped mids sound.

SYD String Reviver

Of all the Apollo series pedals, this one wins the 'niche' award. According to the marketing materials, the pedal 'brightens up your strings to bring out the sparkle in both electric and electro-acoustic instruments, giving definition in the mix, live and in the studio'. The implication is that this is a pedal designed to make old strings sound fresh again. You may well ask why anyone swould spend over £100 on a pedal to do this when a new set of strings costs about £6, but if you do a ton of gigs back-to-back, then you might just find yourself sounding a bit dead halfway though a set.

In practice the SYD is a sort of clean boost/preamp pedal with a fine-tuned tone control, called Slope, which works on the top end EQ shape. The V-Switch controls Definition, which is basically a drive control, but one that only pushes the sound in an obvious way at higher settings. The Alternate footswitch again offers two level options. By balancing these parameters and brightening the top end it is possible to get more cut from a set of lifeless old strings; personally I found the SYD more useful as a four-stage clean booster with the capability to brighten the sound of a guitar with dark humbuckers. It's pretty subtle, but pedals like this can often have a wide range of applications.

LAX Glass Chorus

This analogue chorus pedal offers a similar four-stage architecture. The V-Switch lets you access two different Depth settings and the Alternate footswitch two different modulation Rate settings. This time the tone control is called Glass and, once again, it works as a hi-end EQ. This is a lush-sounding chorus pedal that excels at creating some of the classic sounds we all know and love (think *Come As You Are* or *Message In A Bottle*). Where some chorus effects can get soupy or muddy at the extremes this one keeps its clarity, so you can explore some mad sounds if the fancy takes you. The fact you can set up radically different but potentially related chorus patches and switch between them is very useful, and more subtle shifts of emphasis can be used to great effect when working on longer pieces of music where you might want to re-perform parts. The biggest limitation is that it only works as a mono effect. This will be fine for most guitarists in the live setting, but a stereo option for the studio would be good.

Verdict

The Apollo pedals aren't just another range of tick-all-the-boxes effects, and they do deserve our attention. All the units performed well and delivered excellent sounds. Having easy access to four preset sounds is extremely useful, especially live. While the V-Switch system's flexibility could be emulated in a pedal format with an on/off footswitch and a pair of A/B switches to access parameters, this design allows the units to occupy a standard-sized enclosure. With added functionality but a familiar footprint on your pedalboard, these pedals are definitely practical tools for working musicians.

FINAL SCORE

SYD STRING REVIVER	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**16**/20
Sound	**16**/20
Value for money	**17**/20
Looks	**16**/20
TOTAL	**83%**

FINAL SCORE

LAX GLASS CHORUS	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**17**/20
Sound	**16**/20
Value for money	**17**/20
Looks	**17**/20
TOTAL	**85%**

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DIGITECH
Luxe

This 'polyphonic detune pedal' promises to make everything sound better – and that is a very, very big claim indeed. Review by **Richard Purvis**

The first few decades of pop music saw engineers tampering with studio equipment to create a host of wondrous 'colour' effects, from chorus and flanging to swirly phasing and Leslie-style vibrato… and we've pretty much stuck with them ever since. Well, what else can you do to a guitar without making it not sound like a guitar? The appeal of a pedal that can add shimmery depth to your tone in a new way is obvious – and Digitech reckons it has just such a product. They're calling it an 'anti-chorus', and we're about to find out if the story of guitar effects is suddenly in need of a new chapter.

The Luxe uses digital pitch-shifting – specifically, an algorithm borrowed from the company's infamously zany Whammy pedals – to add an extra 'voice' to your signal. The detuned sound is not modulated, as it would be by the low-frequency oscillator in a standard chorus pedal, so we're promised all the lushness with none of the pulsating wobble. It's not the first time anyone's done this, but it might be the first time the effect has had its own dedicated stompbox.

The Luxe lives in a low-slung white metal case with an extravagantly flowery design and two encouragingly 'industrial' silver knobs. It's a neat little chunk. There's no battery operation – digital effects munch through PP3s like rats through a Christmas pudding – but the power supply is included in the box. On the front of the pedal we have a Level control for adjusting the depth of the effect, and a Detune dial with 50 cents below pitch at one end and 50 cents above at the other.

Sounds

If we start with the Detune knob dead on the halfway line, the affected signal will be in tune with the dry – so will the pedal be effectively off? Not quite. Bringing up the Level gradually, we hear just a hint of watery strangeness seeping into the tone, and if we then knock the effect out of tune by just a few cents either way, the lushness begins to flood in.

It's basically a chorus/flange-type effect, adding an artificial kind of depth to the tone that can get rather metallic. Still, while the core sound is more or less familiar, it's true that the rhythmic element is greatly reduced… though not gone completely. As you'll know if you've ever played octaves on a guitar with dodgy intonation, two notes that are not quite in tune will create a bit of a throbbing effect anyway. It's nature's way of begging you to adjust your bridge saddles.

This is a two-knob pedal, but you could almost call it one and a half: the detuning is symmetrical, so the effect sounds virtually identical at nine o'clock and three o'clock. Only at the furthest extremes can you really feel the detuned signal veering away from the original note in one direction or the other, and here the modulation is fast and heavy – it's a pretty freaky kind of sound, not quite as atonal as a ring modulator, but close.

Verdict

Sadly for anyone expecting a revolution, the Luxe is at its best when it's subtle – which is exactly when it sounds most like a conventional modulation pedal. Still, Digitech deserves credit for doing something different, even if it doesn't sound quite as different as it looks.

FINAL SCORE	
DIGITECH LUXE	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**15**/20
Sound	**16**/20
Value for money	**16**/20
Vibe	**16**/20
TOTAL	**81%**

FACTFILE
Digitech Luxe

SPECS **Digital 'polyphonic detune' pedal. Made in China**
RRP **£119**

CONTROLS **Level, Detune; True bypass footswitch; 9V PSU input (PSU included)**

DIMENSIONS **120mm x 75mm x 45mm**
Weight **0.163kg/0.36lbs**

CONTACT **Sound Technology 01462 480000 www.digitech.com www.soundtech.co.uk**

Like this? Try this…

Electro-Harmonix
Pitch Fork
EHX's new POG-derived footpedal has assorted pitch-shifting powers at its disposal, including a flangey detune mode
RRP **£97 approx**

MOOER
Pitch Box
This note-nudging marvel of miniaturisation has three modes: harmony, pitch shift and detune
RRP **£60**

MXR
Uni-Vibe Chorus/Vibrato
A little black box of vintage throbbiness with switchable chorus and vibrato modes
RRP **£113**

Lick Of The Day: not just blues, but all styles

Guitar Jam Tracks: basic backing for £2.99

Session Band: create custom backing tracks

iPad: the ultimate guitar tool?

This slim device can do so much more than games and surfing: with the right add-ons, it can be your guitar nerve-centre. **Martyn Casserly** has been shopping

With Christmas almost upon us, a guitarist's mind turns to the quiet contemplation of which new pedal, amp, or shiny guitar would be the best choice for celebrating the festive season, and these thoughts are swiftly followed by the creation of wonderfully inventive ways to justify these new additions to either your partner or bank manager. But before you click on the 'buy' button, or head down to your local guitar shop, ponder, if you will, another option.

Since its introduction in 2010, Apple's iPad has become a regular fixture in many homes, helping the UK populace browse Amazon and Facebook while watching the telly. What you might not know is that this simple slab of glass and electronics could also be the single most useful tool in any guitarists' arsenal. Not convinced? Well, read on, and we'll show you the wealth of apps and accessories available that you could use to take your playing to the next level – well, just as long as you can avoid the black hole of productivity and financial ruin that Candy Crush presents. We didn't say it would be easy.

PRACTICE

Playing the guitar is a pretty simple thing. Put your fingers there, strum this, move that; no, not there, up one; no, up a fret, not a string, yes, that's it. Simple. Getting better at playing the guitar is somewhat harder. Of course there is pretty much only one way to improve (we accept that now after those magic beans made no difference and left us down a cow), and that's boring old practising. Putting in the hard yards, coaxing errant fingers to contort and move in seemingly unnatural ways, all the while wondering how Steve Vai seems to make the whole damn thing look so effortless. Anything that can help in this lonely and physically bewildering endeavour would be a blessing to all involved. Thankfully an iPad comes armed with many tools to make things more bearable, so let's head to the App Store and see what's on offer.

LICK OF THE DAY – Free (lessons priced individually)

A great way to grow your musical vocabulary is learning new licks. This app is an excellent resource, with multiple styles covered including blues, rock, funk, country, metal, and others. Lessons are packaged into volumes that contain either 25 or 50 examples of a style, usually costing £2.99. Inside each volume are also a couple of free licks to act as tasters. You can also download the lessons so they'll still work when you don't have an internet connection.

The app screen itself is broken into three sections, with the track menu on the left, a main video screen on the right, and beneath this the tab for the piece with a map of the fretboard showing you where to put your fingers as the video plays. The tuition is of a professional standard, with a full-speed play-through and then a slower section with the teacher explaining exactly what they're doing. Excellent.

GUITAR JAM TRACKS SCALE TRAINER & PRACTICE BUDDY (£2.99)

It can be less than inspiring to sit in a room and play along to nothing, and that's why backing tracks are so much fun. Turning up your guitar and jamming along to a mystery band that always show up on time and never tire of your ceaseless widdling is a thing of beauty. Guitar Jam Tracks does all this but also throws in chord charts to stop you getting lost, provides fretboard maps to show you the scales you can use, and will switch between any key (major or minor) at the touch of a virtual button. There is a free version (Guitar Jam Tracks Acoustic Blues) that has two tracks and the option to buy more. Or you can plump for the Scale Trainer & Practice Buddy that has more styles and retails for a very reasonable £2.99.

Ultimate Guitar Tabs: wave goodbye to that bulky folder of cheat sheets

GuitarToolkit: tuner, metronome and more

Garageband: the essential budget recording app

Amplitube: excellent amp and FX modelling

Jamming along to a mystery band that never tire of your ceaseless widdling is a thing of beauty

SESSION BAND (£1.99 – £5.99 depending on app)

Jam tracks are always fun, but sometimes they don't quite scratch the musical itch. Session Band is a great alternative as it gives users the chance to create their own, using pre-recorded loops. This might sound a little daunting, but thanks to a cleverly-designed user interface and step-by-step tutorial it's actually very straight forward. You simply choose the style (say slow blues rock), pick the key you want, cycle through the various chords available via a piano keyboard (no chord knowledge required), then pinch your fingers to stretch or shrink the section. In just a few minutes you can set up a track that fits whatever song is in your head, which is very useful if you're writing an original piece. There are various styles of music available in separate apps, although they'll need to be bought individually. So if you're stylistically diverse you might need to save up, but for what you get, the cost is justified.

ULTIMATE GUITAR TABS HD (£7.99 for a year's subscription)

Remembering all the chords to songs can be tricky, especially if you play in a function band and the belle of the ball stumbles up asking for an obscure song request. In the past an essential part of your gig bag was a folder containing the sheet music to your various sets, which over time would become heavy and cumbersome. Well, you can set fire to the lot of it now, as Ultimate Guitar Tabs is an essential app that gives you access to over 400,000 songs, all packed into the slight frame of an iPad.

For an annual fee of £7.99 you can save chord sheets on your device, and even arrange them into handy playlists. You can also adjust the key up or down, and many have chord boxes available. The tabs are user-generated on the whole, with several versions for each song, so you might need to hunt around for the right one, but it's usually there.

GUITARTOOLKIT (£6.99)

Sometimes you just need a few bits and pieces to get things done. GuitarToolkit is an all-in-one solution for many tasks that face a practising guitarist. You won't find fancy amp emulation or track creation features here, instead there's a tuner, chord boxes, scale patterns, and a metronome... all handy essential tools. There are also in-app purchase options to expand the features, with a programmable drum machine being the star of the show.

ALSO TRY: OnSong, Jammit, Jamup Pro, Jambox Jamtrack

RECORDING/PERFORMANCE

Once upon a time, if you wanted to record any kind of demo or album you'd have to divine the mysteries of a Tascam 4-track Portastudio, or pay a small fortune to go into a professional studio. Computers have changed that, but software still isn't cheap and the learning curve can be steep. On an iPad the apps are simplified to make them easy to use, but this doesn't mean that they are simple. You can record compositions quickly using full digital suites, replete with amp and pedal models, and all from the comfort of your sofa, or indeed a caravan if that is your want. We've even seen musicians in function bands embracing the use of iPads in live settings, with impressive results and much smaller bags to carry home.

GARAGEBAND (£2.99)

Making music on an iPad is easier than you might think. A great place to start is Apple's Garageband app, which retails for a ridiculous £2.99. In here you'll find a simple interface, a full suite of instruments (such as bass guitar, drums, and strings) which can be recorded live via virtual fretboards or kits, and a bevy of loops that are copyright-free.

Your iPad has a built-in mic, so you can record your guitar that way (which is passable but certainly not incredible), but if you opt for one of the many guitar interfaces (see Sonic Port and Apogee One) then you'll have access to various built-in amp and guitar emulations, plus the ability to use any other amp simulation app in conjunction with Garageband. The app even has a quantising feature to help fix out of time playing. Magic.

AMPLITUBE (£13.99)

Guitar emulation apps offer powerful ways to transform your iPad into a full pedalboard and amp rig, all for less than the price of a capo. Amplitube is an excellent example, as it contains 11 effects and five amps, alongside the advanced features of a recording track (good for quickly getting down ideas) which can be expanded (for £10.49) up to a full suite of eight tracks for more advanced compositions. There's also a drum machine to add some beats, and a phrase trainer so you can brush up on your soloing before recording those epic eight bars.

You can purchase expansion packs that feature a variety of specialist amp and effect modules. These include brand-specific offerings such as Fender or Orange, and musician-related apps like Slash or Hendrix. Each app costs £10.49, or you can but the whole kit and caboodle for £31.99 – which is still less than a decent pedal. The sounds are all very good, but bear in mind that you'll need a digital input to make it work. Thankfully, we've got a few of those in our next section.

ALSO TRY: Ampkit+, iShred Live, GuitarTone, Auria

EXPANDING YOUR HORIZONS

The iPad by itself is very useful, but to truly open up the musical possibilities there are a number of accessories that could bring the electronic wonder into the heart of your rig. When you consider the cost of a high end multi-FX unit, many of these gadgets come at very affordable prices, and due to their digital natures they will be open to software updates in the future which could increase their capabilities. ↔

Line 6 Sonic Port: a neat, easy interface

The Squier iOS Strat has an onboard mini-USB connector

Apogee One: not exactly cheap, but what a sound

With an iOS-ready guitar you can plug directly into your iPad and practise or record in silence

LINE 6 SONIC PORT (£69)

It's all well and good having these amazing tones and recording features available in apps, but unless you can plug your guitar into the iPad you're not going to get much use out of them. The Sonic Port is a neat little solution for this problem, and small enough to fit in a jacket pocket or guitar case. Just plug the Sonic Port into the iPad via the included lead (which caters for both lightning and older 30-pin connections), then plug your guitar into the standard jack socket on the device. That's it... you're done. Load up a favourite app – Garageband, Amplitube, or any other that supports Core Audio (pretty much all of them) – and you should have access to the tones that the app has available. Tracking is very fast, with no discernible latency, and power comes from your iPad rather than a wall plug.

One standout feature is that there are two jack sockets, one of which is an output. This means that you can place your iPad in front of your physical amp, using the Sonic Port to send the signal from your application. So, if you have something like Amplitube installed, it now becomes an effects unit for live gigs. Very cool, although don't try stomping on it. Try pairing it instead with IK Multimedia's iKlip Xpand holder, which attaches your iPad to a mic stand for easy operation.

APOGEE ONE (£299)

Yes, we know, that price – but Apogee make high-grade music recording hardware, and the One takes that expertise to the iPad. If you want premium AD/DA converters and a studio quality mic all in a package marginally bigger than an iPhone (and you have the cash), then the Apogee One is about as good as it gets. It's a 2-in 2-out interface, so you can record both instrument and vocal takes simultaneously – so long as the app supports that feature – and the sound quality is something special. It's not cheap, but it doesn't feel it either. If you don't need the microphone or dual inputs though, the Apogee Jam (£119.95) might be a more sensible option.

LINE 6 AMPLIFI 75W (£299)

Line 6 has bypassed the idea of linking apps to your amp, and instead made your iPad the core engine of the amp itself. The AMPLIFi is a new breed of backline, that comes packing a rather paltry four amp models, but when connected via Bluetooth to an iOS device it has access to hundreds of modelled classics, and a world of effects. It is also, cleverly, a high-class speaker for your digital media – again via Bluetooth – and can blend the sounds of your guitar against songs you stream to the unit. It can also search the Line 6 online database to find any guitar tones that match the track being played.

The elegant design features an 8" central speaker with two high- and two mid-frequency drivers for hi-fi style aural pleasure. If the 75w model is too small, you could always step up to the 150w 12" version. Conversely you could always try the iLoud (£239) portable amp from IK Multimedia, which packs a more neighbour-friendly 40w into its easily-carriable frame.

FENDER DELUXE STRATOCASTER HSS PLUS TOP WITH iOS CONNECTIVITY

In 2014 Fender took the unusual step of releasing a version of its legendary guitar featuring digital outputs for USB and iOS devices alongside the traditional analogue jack. In most respects the Fender Deluxe Stratocaster HSS Plus Top with iOS Connectivity (who, pray, is the person in charge of naming new models) is a standard guitar, only now you can plug it directly into your iPad (via the included lead), as well as your amp. This means you can practice quietly in the corner of the room with your headphones on, or even record parts for a song in Garageband, without annoying the rest of the household.

ALSO TRY: iRig HD, Digitech iStomp, Focusrite iTrack Solo.

Line 6 AMPLIFi: taking your iPad creations out into the world

Apps CONTACT INFO

LICK OF THE DAY
https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/lick-of-the-day/id371728474?mt=8

GUITAR JAM TRACKS
https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/guitar-jam-tracks-scale-trainer/id436102935?mt=8

SESSION BAND
https://itunes.apple.com/app/id580135085

ULTIMATE GUITAR TABS HD
http://app.ultimate-guitar.com/apps/ipad/ugt/

GUITARTOOLKIT
https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/guitartoolkit/id284962368?mt=8

GARAGEBAND
https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/garageband/id408709785?mt=8

AMPLITUBE
https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/id373750924?mt=8

The Deluxe Strat with iOS: classy and DI-ready

CONCLUSION

While there are many great reasons to buy standalone FX, amps, and recording platforms, the speed at which the iPad has matured into such a versatile device is impressive. For the price of a midrange guitar you can have a fully-featured recording studio, effects rig, and songbook all in a package barely bigger than this magazine. The touch-based nature of the iPad means that apps are easy to learn, as the interface quickly gets out of your way, leaving you can play rather than spend time reading manuals. When an idea strikes you can set up in mere seconds, which can make all the difference. It won't necessarily replace your cherished gear, but it could the best addition to your collection that you ever make.

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Satisfy your "Appetite for Destruction"!

SLASH "AFD" Les Paul MODEL PERFORMANCE PACK

Appetite for Destruction

Introducing the Epiphone Slash "AFD" Les Paul® Performance Pack, the world's only premium guitar pack that gives you both a real Les Paul and a 15 watt amp approved by the ultimate Les Paul master, Slash. Featuring the Epiphone Slash "AFD" Les Paul® Special II and a custom Epiphone Slash "Snakepit-15" amplifier, plus an Epiphone strap, cable, Dunlop® Tortex® Slash picks, and a premium gigbag with Slash signature art. The Slash "AFD" Les Paul features

Epiphone's new Ceramic Plus™ Zebra Coil humbucker pickups with a Shadow® E-tuner ***built into*** the bridge pickup mounting ring. And, the "Snakepit-15" amp features both Overdrive and Clean channels that can easily dial up hard rock, metal, and blues with just the right amount of power for recording, playing small clubs or jamming around the house. With FREE online guitar lessons from eMedia®, the new Epiphone "AFD" Slash Performance Pack has everything you need and comes at a price that destroys all others. Make your own history with the Slash "AFD" Performance Pack today at your nearest Epiphone Dealer.

Check out Slash's newest CD, "**World On Fire**"

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fender.com/mustang

MUSTANG V.2 SERIES AMPLIFIERS

HIGH SPEED, AMPED UP AND LOUD

Fender®

RODE
i-XY Microphone

Want to turn your iPhone or iPad into a stereo recorder? The i-XY promises 'broadcast quality audio in your pocket'. Review by **Marcus Leadley**

An iPhone, of course, can already record, but without a device like the i-XY, you are limited to mono; with a i-XY, you can record 24bit/96kHz stereo audio. The i-XY features a pair of 1/2" cardioid condenser capsules in a fixed X/Y configuration, a high-quality onboard analogue-digital converter and a Lightning connector. It comes with mounts that allow the use of the iPhone 5, 5s, 6 and 6 Plus.

Out of the box the i-XY feels solid. It ships with a foam windshield and a carry case. This fits both the i-XY and the shield, and has a belt clip; it's not a pocket-sized accessory. As well as the alternative rubber mounts, there's a little tool for changing them. Once you've fitted the one that suits your device you simply push the i-XY into the Lightning connector port. The mount holds the unit securely and covers the Home button, but there's a flexible rubber nub that allows it to continue functioning. A little green LED lights up when the unit's connected properly.

The i-XY is designed to work with the Rode Rec app. There's a free LE version and a professional upgrade that will cost you £3.99. The LE has all the basic recording functions, while the upgrade allows you to edit and normalise files and gives you EQ and dynamic controls and more file output options, including MP3. The app recognises the mic connection as soon as it's made.

While the basics of recording are very simple, there are quite a few menus you'll need to get to grips with. You'll need to specify the sample rate, from 8kHz-96kHz; higher rates yield higher quality recordings, but they require more memory. This may be an issue if you're someone who keeps a lot of music and data on your phone.

As well as stereo you can also configure the microphones to record in mono, which makes the i-XY a lot more flexible. There are plenty of occasions when you might want to record in mono, especially if you intend to incorporate the finished recording in a multi-track mix at a later stage. The dual mono option is also useful if you want to create separation between two musicians playing a duet, or record an interview. Once you have your recordings, the Rode Rec app lets you upload them directly to Dropbox or SoundCloud. It also allows the necessary file sharing with your computer.

Sounds

I tested the i-XY with a number of sources, electric guitar, acoustic guitar and voice in the studio, and also took it on a tour of my neighbourhood recording buskers, churches and traffic. Much to my surprise I could definitely hear a difference between recording at 48kHz and 96kHz, with the latter sounding richer, more transparent and more lifelike. Some minor preamp noise was detectable when recording very quiet signals but the live instrument recordings were essentially noise-free.

The XY coincident pair has become something of a standard for hand-held recorders as it generally yields good results. There are limitations – the narrowness of the stereo field, for example – but there really isn't enough room for this to develop unless your about 6-10 feet from the source, which is ideal for recording concerts or practice sessions. Using the mono options for close mic'ing might not seem sexy, but that's the way to get detail, clarity and pro-sounding results.

Verdict

The Rode i-XY is an excellent product. If you already have an iPhone or iPad it's a quick way to add a lot of audio fidelity. As an accessory there are compromises to consider: you can't record and use the phone at the same time; you may have issues with available memory; you can't use headphones to monitor as you record for any sample rates over 88.2 kHz; and at lower levels there seems to be a degree of latency to contend with. There are also plenty of dedicated high-quality portable recorders on the market at, or below, the cost of the i-XY. These take memory cards and can be connected to a range of different mics. However, in my opinion, the i-XY outperforms the built-in mics of standalone units in this price bracket, as all the money has been spent on the capsules and the A/D conversion.

FINAL SCORE

RODE I-XY	
Build Quality	**19**/20
Versatility	**18**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**17**/20
Vibe	**17**/20
TOTAL	**89%**

FACTFILE
Rode i-XY

SPECS **Stereo cardioid condenser microphones in fixed XY configuration (switchable to mono mode) for iPhone and iPad. Built-in A/D conversion. Ships with alternative mounts for iPhone 5, 5s, 6 and 6 Plus. Includes carry case and foam windshield. Works with Rode Rec LE (free) or Rode Rec (£3.99)**
RRP **£149**

Dimensions **48mm high, 55mm wide, 40mm deep**
Weight **40g**

CONTACT **Source Distribution**
0208 962 5080
www.rodemic.com

Like this? Try this...

Zoom
iQ6
XY stereo capsules for your iPhone, designed to work with the free Zoom Handy Recorder app. Adjustable stereo width
RRP **£93.73**

Blue Microphones
Mikey Digital
Stereo condenser mic for iPhone and iPad
RRP **£71.99**

Zoom
H4N
Stereo XY and 4-track recording in a standalone package. XLR connections for alternative mics. Can use battery or mains operation and employs SD memory cards
RRP **£325 (generally discounted to around £159)**

MARTIN
000-18E Retro

Martin aims for the perfect blend of vintage and modern by packing a traditional 000 with the very latest electronics. Review by **Huw Price**

What are the key ingredients of a classic 000-18? The '000' donates the body shape and size, while '18' corresponds with a spruce top and mahogany back and sides: all solid, of course. Purists will expect faux 'tortoise shell' for the binding and pickguard with simple dot markers gracing the fingerboard, a glued dovetail neck joint, and open gear butterbean tuners.

This guitar has 'Retro' in its model designation and as such it ticks each and every box. The top may be sitka rather than Adirondack spruce but the bracing is scalloped, and traditional bone is used for the nut – even if the saddle, slightly perplexingly, is Tusq. The colour of the top is impressive: not too light and not too orange. Interestingly, Martin has used ebony rather than rosewood for the fingerboard and bridge, just like the very earliest 14-fret 000-18. The medium depth neck has a satin finish and a 24.9" scale length, and it's supremely playable. The fact that the tuners are Grovers rather than Waverleys may be a bit of a compromise but hey, we're not complaining.

Tucked away on the side of this fine vintage reissue is a very discrete pair of controls with a small display window. Despite appearances, the 000-18E is not short on features – in fact it contains a virtual toolbox for amplifying the guitar. The controls are multi-function and provide access to almost every conceivable parameter, but the manual is essential reading. Onboard is a Fishman F1 Aura Plus system that combines an undersaddle piezo with nine Images (Fishman-speak for digital models). Rather than a plethora of random guitars and various other stringed instruments, the Images are all based on recordings of a 1940s 000-18 from the Martin museum that were created using various high-end studio microphones. The controls allow you to select the image you want, alter the balance between the pickup and image signals, then adjust the bass, middle and treble for both sources. There's an onboard tuner, editable compressor, phase switching, and an automatic anti-feedback filter. Technophobes may be relieved to learn that the 000-18E can be booted up in an intuitive 'Easy Mode' as well as full 'Performance Mode'. The jack socket and battery reside in a moulded plastic compartment mounted in a recess routed into the tail block. It does feel a bit flimsy, but only time can tell how robust it really is.

Dovetail neck joint with strap button ready-fitted

Neck profile is a Modified Low Oval with the Performing Artist taper

This guitar ticks every 'retro' box but it's fitted with a Fishman F1 Aura Plus with nine models of a 1940s Martin 000-18

FACTFILE
Martin
000-18E Retro

DESCRIPTION
000-sized electro-acoustic. Made in the USA
PRICE **£2149 inc. hard case**

BUILD **Solid sitka spruce top with solid mahogany back and sides, one piece 'select hardwood' neck, ebony fingerboard and bridge, tortoise bindings, Modified Low Ovalneck profile, Grover open gear tuners with butterbean buttons**
ELECTRICS **Customised Fishman Aura Plus system**
LEFT-HANDERS **Yes, at the same price**
FINISH **Satin neck, gloss body with tinted top**

SCALE LENGTH
632mm/24.9"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 44mm
12th fret 54mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 19.5mm
Ninth fret 21mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 38.5mm
Bridge 56mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 2mm
12th fret bass 2.5mm
WEIGHT **1.84kg/4.05lbs**

CONTACT **Westside Distribution**
0141 248 4812
www.martinguitar.com

Like this? Try this...

Taylor
812CE
Taylor recently re-voiced its flagship rosewood/spruce 800 Series with optimised bracing, wood thicknesses, glues, finish, strings and electronics. This all solid Grand Concert has a Venetian, Taylor Expression System 2, maple binding and back strip, rosewood top edge trim, and a rosewood pickguard
RRP **£2519**

Atkin
OM18 Retrospective
If you'd prefer a vintage Martin-style guitar built to your own specs here in the UK, the Atkin OM 18 has Honduras mahogany back and sides, a sitka spruce top, ebony board and bridge. The price doesn't include electronics, but you can request what you like
RRP **£2149**

Larrivee
OM-05E
An orchestra model guitar built from all solid woods with Canadian sitka spruce top, mahogany back and sides, one-piece mahogany dovetail joint neck, African ebony bridge and fingerboard and an abalone rosette. Comes with Schaller tuners and an LR Baggs iMix Notch System
RRP **£2049**

The solid sitka top has scalloped sitka X-bracing

Multi-use knobs keep the controls to a minimum

'Select hardwood' neck has an Indian rosewood facing

The Fishman F1 Aura Plus sounds more like an acoustic guitar than an electro-acoustic, and that's high praise indeed

Sound

Acoustically, at least, the fundamental consideration has to be whether this is a good 000-18. It most certainly is, with a tone that is absolutely what you'd expect from this model. Although not especially loud or powerful, the upper frequencies are ethereal but sweet, the midrange response seamlessly connects the bass to the treble, and string-to-string balance makes for easy playing. This 00018 'warmed up' after being played for a while, and once it did it was hard to stop playing the thing. Although many Martin fans espouse rosewood as the ultimate tonewood, there's something about the earthy midrange focus of mahogany that makes it a joy. It's less about projecting a wide frequency range of tones into a room and more about creating an intimate and involving musical experience for the player... and mahogany guitars are often easier to record. Given the pedigree it's hardly surprising that there are no worries on the acoustic side, so let's shift to the pickup system.

Factory fresh, the 000-18E boots up in Easy Mode. The left control turns to adjust mid scoop and can be pressed to select between three images and the dry pickup. The right control turns to adjust volume, or you can press it to flip the phase; pressing and holding activates the tuner. Performance Mode allows fine user control but it's more complex, but the manual makes everything clear, and the review guitar shipped with an instructional DVD.

The straight pickup tone is a good starting point, but the Images make everything so much better. At low volume we experienced one of those 'is it on?' moments, and through a studio monitor system it's obvious that the F1 Aura Plus system is configured to create an amplified tone that's as close as possible to the archetypal acoustic sound of a Martin 000-18.

The tone and dynamic shaping are about refinement rather than radical changes, and the feedback-sensing system allowed us to get far louder than we expected with an all-solid acoustic. Many players regard pickup systems as a necessary evil for high volume gigging, but they wouldn't dream of plugging in at home or in the studio. We would have no compunctions about recording this 000-18E direct if separation was an issue – or even blending the Aura output with a microphone for extra tonal colour. The Aura Plus system sounds more like an acoustic guitar than an electro-acoustic, and that's high praise indeed.

Ebony bridge with Tusq saddle and 2 3/16" string spacing

Verdict

Essentially, old-school looks, features and acoustic tone combined with a pickup system that sounds outstanding. The 000-18E Retro isn't cheap, but it's good enough acoustically to be your main home and studio guitar and good enough plugged in to be your main gigging guitar – so that's two for the price of one. It's hard for heritage manufacturers to adopt modern technology without compromising the nature of their iconic guitars. Misses are more common than hits, but Martin has got it bang on with 000-18E Retro.

FINAL SCORE

MARTIN 000-18E RETRO	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**19**/20
Sound	**19**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Looks	**19**/20
TOTAL	**93%**

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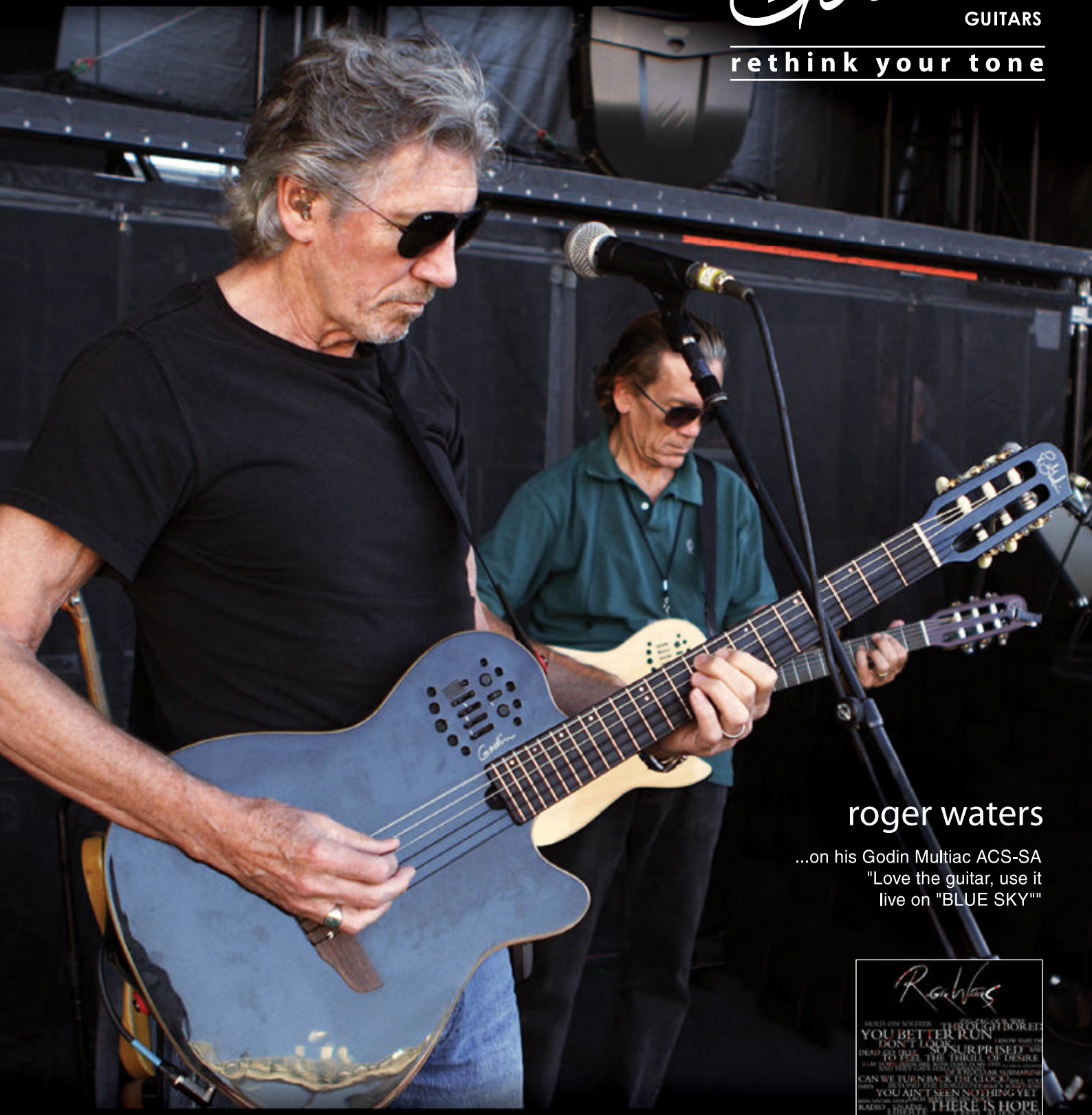
rethink your tone



roger waters

...on his Godin Multiac ACS-SA
"Love the guitar, use it
live on "BLUE SKY""

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BURNS
Nu-Sonic Bass

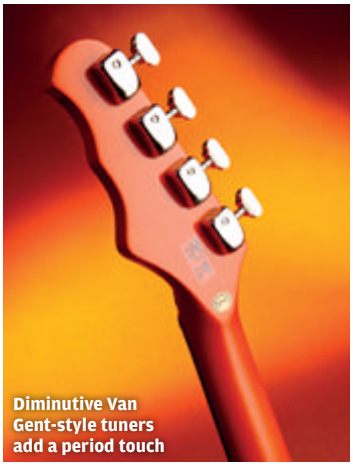
If you're looking for light weight and impeccable '60s credibility then the weeny but addictive Nu-Sonic might be for you. Review by **Gareth Morgan**

With short-scale basses like the Epiphone EB-0 and assorted Fender/Squier Mustangs, Broncos and Jaguar Specials currently so popular, it seems only right and fair that the designs of the late Jim Burns – so often dubbed 'the British Leo Fender' – should get a piece of the action. This month, we're looking at the new, or quite possibly nu, Nu-Sonic… an instrument not as famous in British rock history as the Marvin or Bison versions, true, but a bass with a certain charm all of its own.

Jim Burns began producing guitars in 1958, establishing Burns London Ltd in 1960. A true pioneer, he spearheaded such innovations as 24-fret fingerboards, active electronics and stacked coil pickups. In 1965 he sold the operation to the Baldwin Piano and Organ Company of Cincinnati for $380,000 and company fortunes fluctuated through the '70s and '80s until 1992, when Barry Gibson restarted the brand, employing Jim as a consultant. Since then, Burns has provided us with eye-catching reissues and developments of instruments plucked from a period of intense creativity for British guitar builders.

'Nu-Sonic' was originally the name of a short-lived guitar from 1964, a budget model which replaced the earlier Sonic of 1960, with a bass version in limited numbers appearing a little later. Today's Nu-Sonic bass is an almost exact replica of its forebear, save for an additional wavy detail on the lower edge of the headstock, often described as a batwing. The body, however, is exactly like that of an original Nu-Sonic bass that Barry Gibson acquired in the late '80s, a reproduction of the guitar design in slightly enlarged form. The compact dimensions and the cheerful red finish give it a toy-like appearance, and the 30"/760mm scale will be just the ticket for new converts to the instrument, bass-doubling guitarists, or those in search of that '60s feel.

The original Nu-Sonic was made of obeche and sycamore; this one is basswood and maple



Diminutive Van Gent-style tuners add a period touch

The Nu-Sonic's 30" scale will be just the ticket for new bass converts, doubling guitarists or those in search of a '60s feel

The Nu-Sonic is made in China and has a basswood body with a maple veneer to show some quality grain pattern through the transparent finish. A double-cutaway design, it has a chunky shark-fin upper horn and a flat section just behind the bridge, and there's no belly or forearm chamfering, just neat and tidy heavily-bevelled edges all round. We love the scratchplate, a stylish and expansive three-ply black/white/black traffolyte affair, and in classic Burns fashion the four-bolt neck plate is designed to match the scratchplate, with the model information neatly etched into it.

The bridge is unusual, scorning the adjustability we take for granted these days with a single – yes, single – chromed steel saddle, tweakable for overall height and back-and-forth intonation, but no more. This isn't about modern-day cost-saving… it's actually the same as the super-simple unit on the original, but minus the cover. ➔

FACTFILE
Burns Nu-Sonic Bass

DESCRIPTION **Short scale solidbody bass. Made in China**
PRICE **£799 inc. hard case**

BUILD **Basswood body with maple veneers, bolt-on maple neck with 21 frets (plus zero fret) on a rosewood fingerboard. Closed gear tuners and top-loading single-saddle bridge. Chrome hardware**

ELECTRICS **Passive with two Burns Nu-Sonic Bass pickups. Two Volumes and one Tone control, three-way pickup selector switch**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Cherry red only**
RANGE OPTIONS **None**

SCALE LENGTH
760mm/30"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 42mm
12th fret 53mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 22mm
12th fret 25mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 12.1mm
Bridge 16mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 2.5mm
12th fret bass 3mm
WEIGHT
3.37kg/7.43lbs

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Danelectro
'58 Longhorn Bass
The quirky '58 Longhorn is a classic short-scale belter which delivers the fundamentals very nicely and looks just fab
RRP **£399**

Gretsch
Electromatic Junior Jet Bass II
Gretsch's budget short-scale offering is a twin-pickup four-string variation on the Duo-Jet design; it's a dependable little bass with a decent array of practical sounds
RRP **£287**

Classic zero fret and a bridge-type string tree

Single-saddle bridge echoes the original

Two volumes and a master tone control

Cut back the tone knob and the warm, sweet thud will have you jumping from walking bass to melodic hip-hop grooves

As far as electronics go, the Nu-Sonic is passive and kitted out with a pair of single-coil pickups with black plastic covers and cool white stencilling. It comes with three knobs – individual pickup volumes and a master tone – plus a three-way pickup toggle switch.

The neck is maple and finished in red to match the body, and the shorter scale length and pleasingly slim profile make it a very enjoyable playing experience. At the top the headstock is nicely recessed to give the strings a healthy break-angle as they cross the black composite nut, and the four Burns closed-gear tuners are copies of the original Van Gent units. They're just about the smallest machineheads we've ever seen fitted on a solidbody bass, so small that they actually fill you with a weird trepidation about using them; it's a worry that proves completely unfounded, as they function exactly as they should. A zero fret stands as the gateway to the rosewood fingerboard, and the official fret count is 21, these being joined by white pearloid dots with three lining up at the octave, plus speck-sized versions along the top edge. You'll also notice the factory strings are flatwounds, and considering the Nu-Sonic's nostalgic inclination, that's a move we heartily approve of.

The pickups have been wound to the same spec as the originals

Sounds

Before we get down to business we must note a certain quirkiness when it comes to the controls. While clicking the toggle up or down solos the individual pickups as usual, and though in these positions the volume knobs work as expected, in twin-pickup mode muting either pickup via its volume control cuts the overall output. This seems a bit weird but the upshot is actually positive, as various combination levels produce variations of similar quality to those attained by tweaking the tone control.

That said, the twin-pickup sound is agreeable, with the flatwound strings producing a pleasing combination of throaty growl and soft thud. There's plenty of throaty low-mids in the sound, with decent clarity hand-in-hand with a slight nasal edge as you move across the fingerboard. The G string has plenty of body with a slightly honky edge, and if this is a little more lively than you'd expect, you'll get good results when you reach for the tone control. For a passive roll-off system it really does offer a quite eyebrow-raising level of variation – more than any other passive bass we've ever come across. At about three quarters-cut you'll unearth a wonderful warm, sweet, thuddy sound, a springy, pseudo-upright tone that'll have you jumping from walking bass to melodic hip-hop grooves in no time.

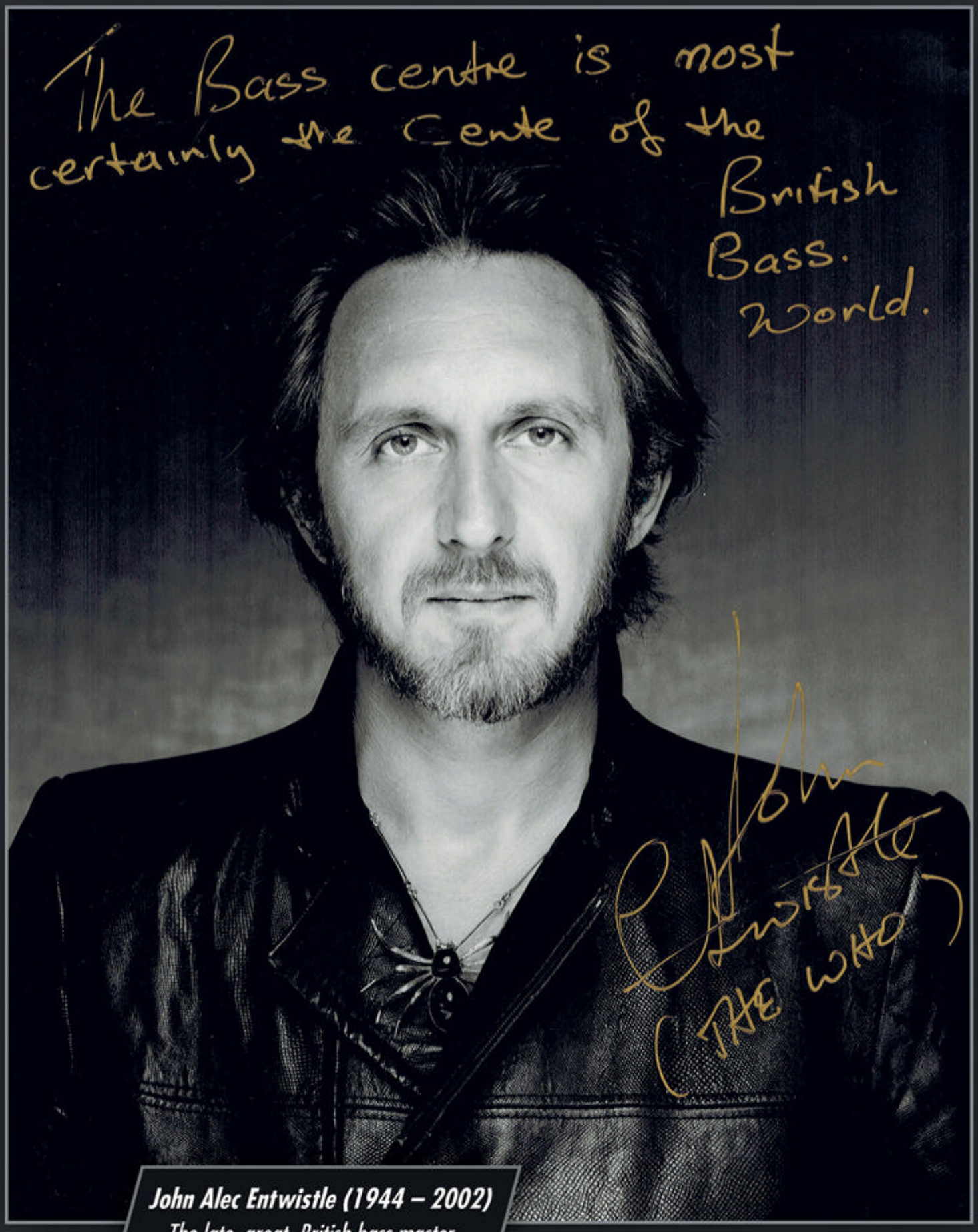
The bridge pickup unleashes a tight, barking noise with a gurgly edge, surprisingly modern and almost Warwick Thumb-like in quality, and again the tone knob locates a nice, softer edge. The neck pickup is rich and earthy with a dark, punchy midrange that suggests its upright forebear and clean highs that sing through, rather than carving their way. A top spot for bluesy rock, this sound gets more rootsy as you roll off the tone, with a throbby dub sound at three-quarters cut.

Verdict

While it's not likely to be the only bass in your arsenal, there are plenty of reasons to own a Nu-Sonic. The shorter scale length will appeal to smaller folk, beginners or occasional bass-playing guitarists, and the tone has more to offer than the merely old-fashioned. Yes, it feels a little toy-like, but the Nu-Sonic has real individuality, the kind of character which reflects the sense of adventure felt by instrument designers such as James Burns in the UK at the time. It's decent value for money, and it's massive fun to play.

FINAL SCORE

BURNS NU-SONIC BASS	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**17**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**16**/20
Vibe	**16**/20
TOTAL	**85%**



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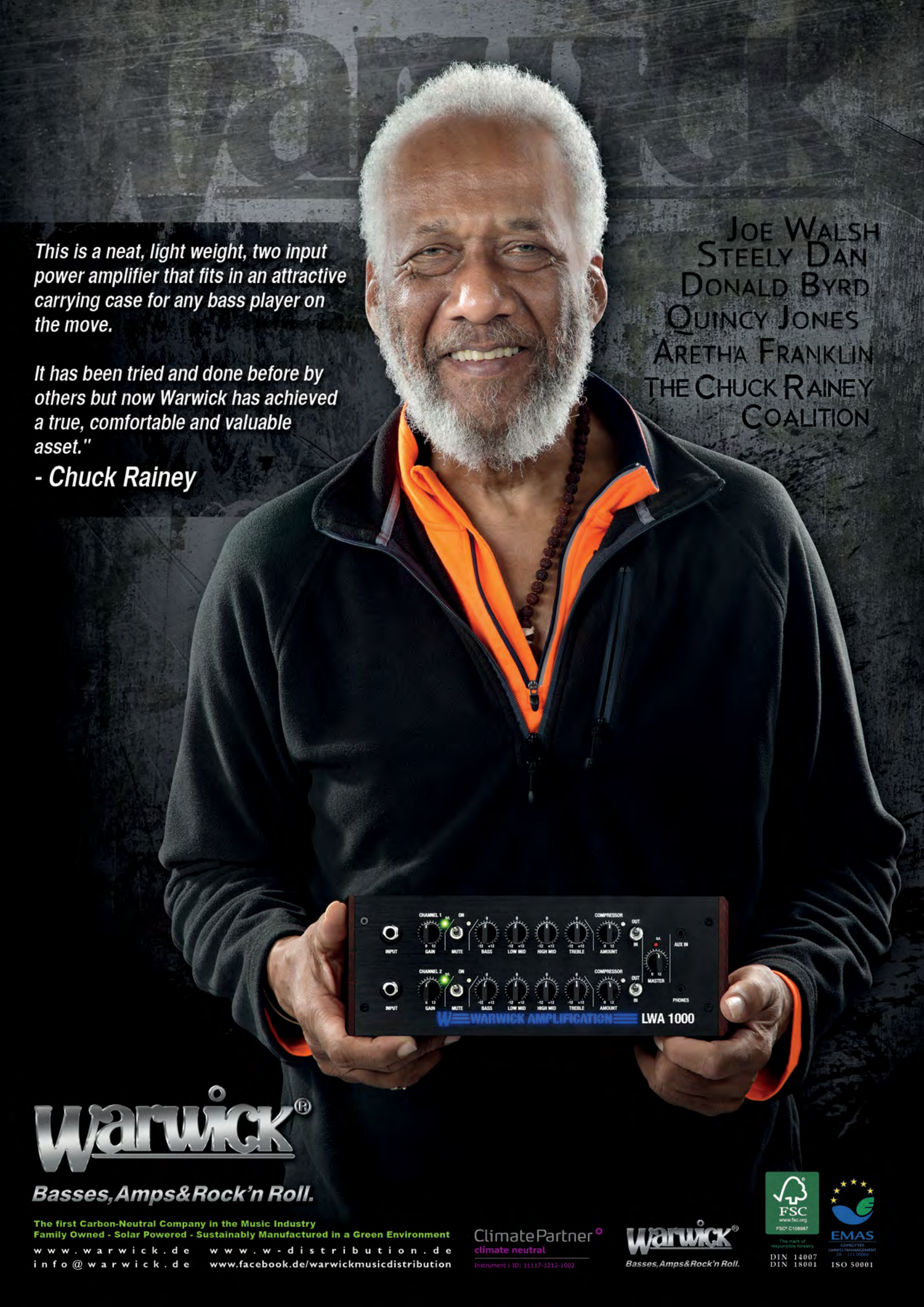
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HOOKED ON CLASSICS

TRICKY TRANSACTIONS

Phil Harris has bought and sold more guitars than it's healthy to think about – but sometimes, he admits, even when the guitar itself is long gone, it's the people that stay in the mind

When you've spent your life, as I have, buying and selling guitars, then you remember deals for all sorts of good and bad reasons. Some are memorable because of the nature of the instrument itself; on other occasions it's about the price. But a fair percentage of the time a deal (or various versions of a 'no-deal') is all about the people you're dealing with. I'm not talking about celebrity here, although that can come into it; on many occasions the back stories of the people you're dealing with can be just as fascinating to the student of the human condition as the musical equipment being bought and sold.

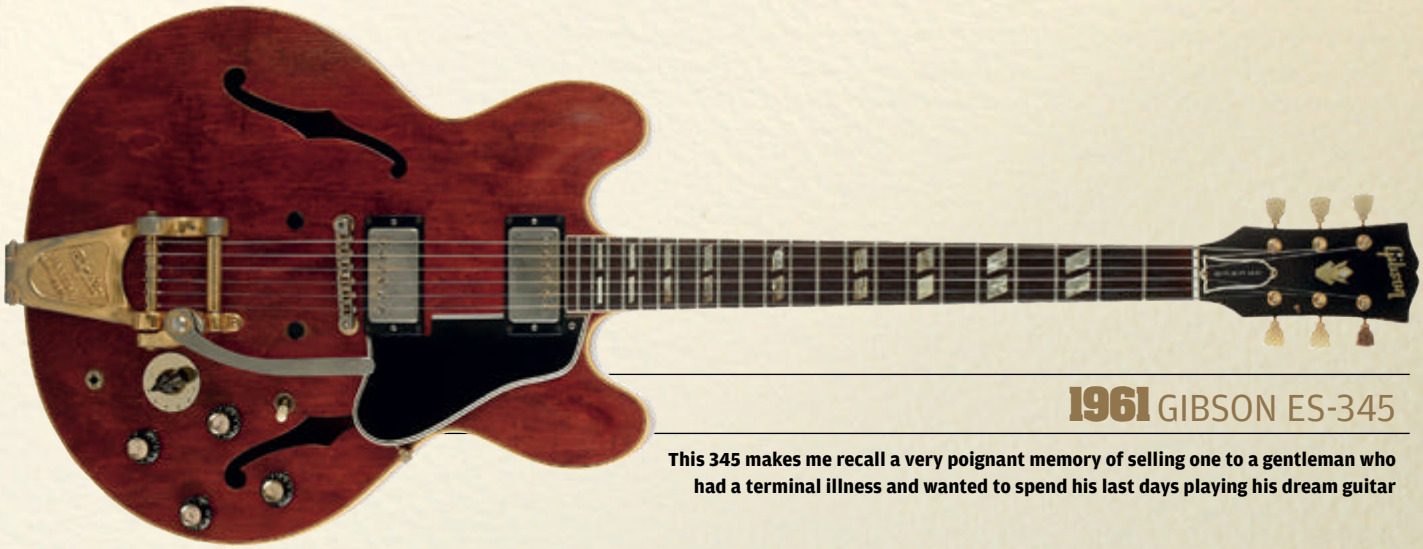
If you have ever had to buy or sell a house then you'll know that – regardless of whether the people you're negotiating with are genuinely lovely or not – you rarely see them at their nicest. The same situation often applies when you're dealing with guitars. People want the best price, and there's often a power struggle based on who needs the money or guitar the most. I've been on both sides of that equation over the years – I once had to sell an SG back in the '70s to pay some bills, and a guy came round three times and played the guitar for hours and still wouldn't even talk about buying it. Don't get me wrong... I understand the importance of sitting down properly with a guitar and seeing if there's some real chemistry between you and the instrument. I know I've played many wonderful instruments where there was absolutely no spark there whatsoever, and I might as well have been playing a plank of wood. Eventually, though, I got so frustrated that I ended up telling him to lose my phone number and to forget all about the guitar.

On the other side of the equation, I've owned instruments that people have spent their whole lives looking for. One of the greatest aspects of selling guitars is that moment when you see people's eyes light up and you know you've made their day, life and year. I know the feeling myself all too well, and there's not much that can beat it.

As with a lot of things, the thorny subject of money is obviously a main factor in doing deals. People will try and either exaggerate or sometimes downright lie about a guitar's strong points or defects, depending on the way they want the price to go. I've also sold things to people who you can tell don't really appreciate what they've got, yet can easily afford it. Speaking as a player, a collector and as a businessman, I can often have conflicting emotions when doing deals. I've sold expensive guitars to investors who were planning to put them in bank vaults. Now as a player that doesn't please me, but as a collector I can appreciate the fact that a rare guitar is going to get looked after rather than bashed about and, eventually, lost forever.

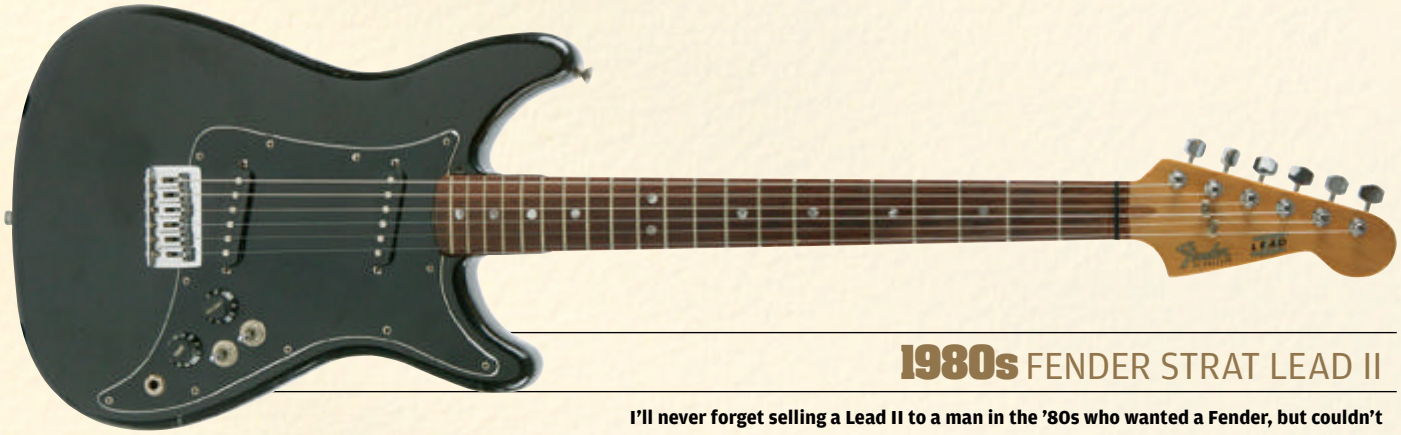
Sometimes people show generosity above and beyond anything you could hope for. A long time ago I sold an Ovation to a gentleman who was looking for the right one and fell in love with the example I showed him. We got talking, and discovered that we both collected war memorabilia. He bought the guitar off me, and in the post the next week was a certain type of medal we'd been talking about. You don't get that level of kindness shown to you very often. So here are some guitars that remind me of some of the memorable people I've dealt with...

'If you've ever had to buy or sell a house, you'll know you rarely see people at their nicest. The same situation often applies with guitars'



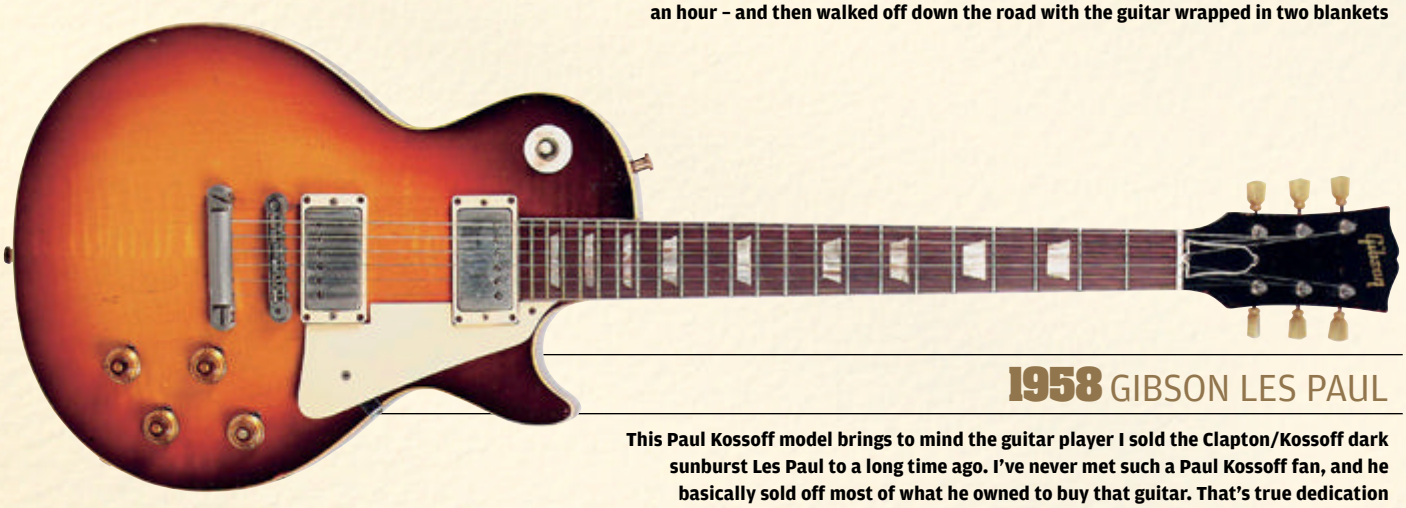
1961 GIBSON ES-345

This 345 makes me recall a very poignant memory of selling one to a gentleman who had a terminal illness and wanted to spend his last days playing his dream guitar



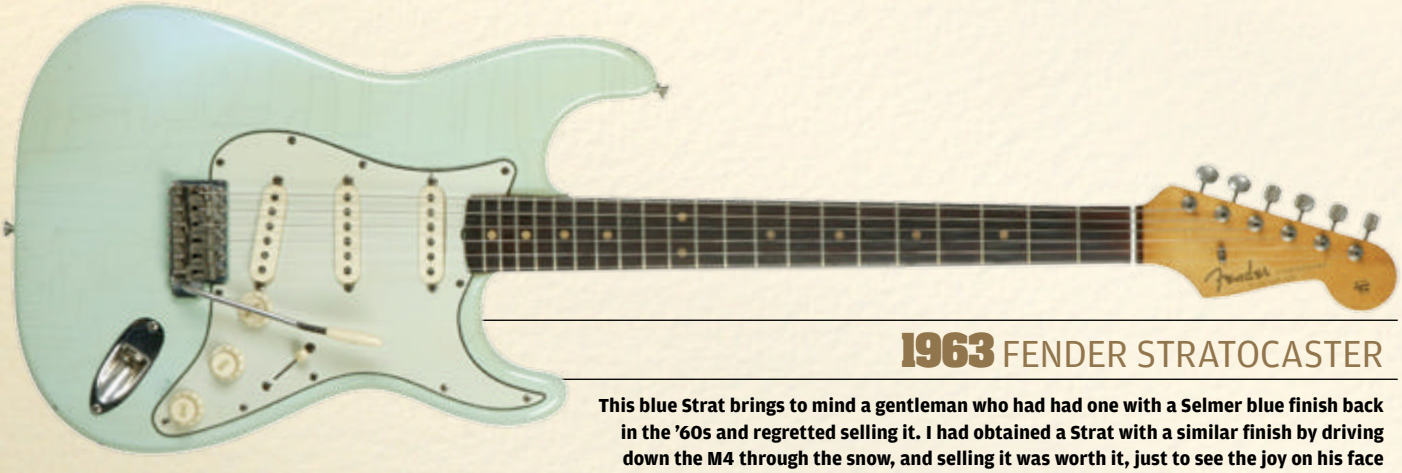
1980s FENDER STRAT LEAD II

I'll never forget selling a Lead II to a man in the '80s who wanted a Fender, but couldn't afford a Tele or Standard Strat. When he came round to buy it, he shook my hand for about an hour – and then walked off down the road with the guitar wrapped in two blankets



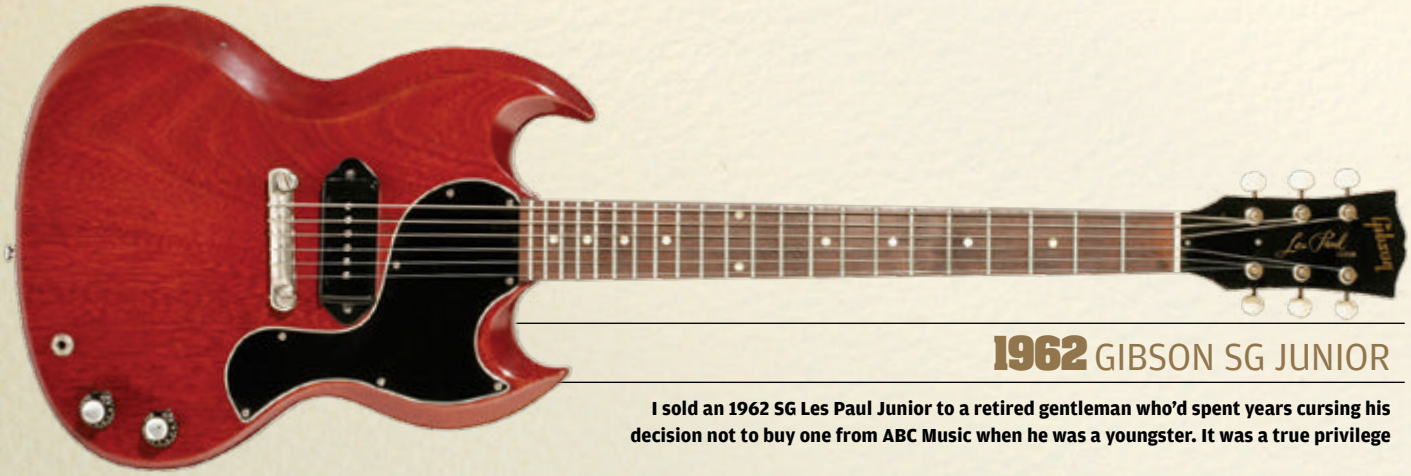
1958 GIBSON LES PAUL

This Paul Kossoff model brings to mind the guitar player I sold the Clapton/Kossoff dark sunburst Les Paul to a long time ago. I've never met such a Paul Kossoff fan, and he basically sold off most of what he owned to buy that guitar. That's true dedication



1963 FENDER STRATOCASTER

This blue Strat brings to mind a gentleman who had had one with a Selmer blue finish back in the '60s and regretted selling it. I had obtained a Strat with a similar finish by driving down the M4 through the snow, and selling it was worth it, just to see the joy on his face



1962 GIBSON SG JUNIOR

I sold an 1962 SG Les Paul Junior to a retired gentleman who'd spent years cursing his decision not to buy one from ABC Music when he was a youngster. It was a true privilege

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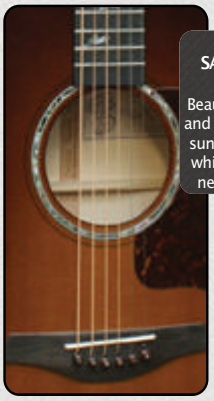

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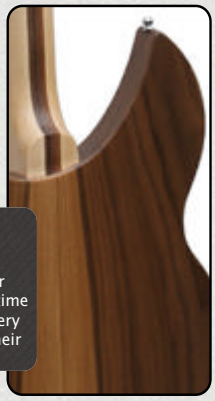

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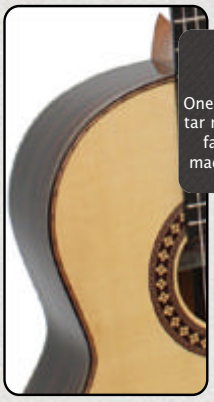

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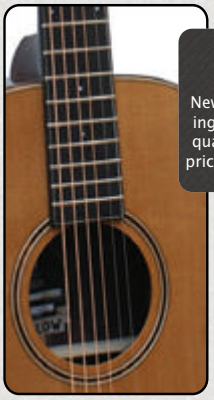

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Private STOCK

Collector-turned-dealer Nick Leggett is in a great position to sample fine guitars and basses. The problem is, which to keep, and which to sell? Interview by Lars Mullen

'It can be a bit daunting, believe it or not,' explains Nick Leggett of Nick's Guitars, surveying the mass of instruments in his possession. 'Although I do enjoy working with so many wonderful guitars, there are problems... mainly my self-control!

'Guitar aficionados will probably think I'm insane, but I have so many wonderful things pass through my hands, guitars that I would love to own and keep, that the best scenario is to move them on pretty quickly to make sure that I don't form a relationship with each one. If that does happen, I often buy them back in for myself. All these guitars are from my own collection, the ones that I've kept when I've felt the need to treat myself... or, more to the point, when I couldn't help myself.'

Tony's collection can be neatly divided into two parts: guitars and basses. 'As a kid in the early '60s, I would watch and admire my dad playing a tenor banjo,' he remembers. 'My brother Tony took up the guitar first; he was left-handed and at the time lefties were really rare, so he decided to do the natural thing and turn the guitar upside down. I'm a little mixed up when it comes to my own dexterity; I perform most tasks as a leftie, like writing and playing cricket, but it felt pretty normal to learn the guitar right-handed.

'My first guitar was a Vox Shadow and my first amp was a Selmer Little Giant, both of which are fetching crazy prices in the USA right now. Like most kids from that era, by the time I was 15, I was ready to be the next guitar hero. I had a pal who was a really good sax player in a school band called the Melodibeats, and they invited me to join. We didn't really play pop songs... it was more like showband music.

'I was really lucky, though, as I upgraded to a '63 Fender Strat, which I got from Barrett's of Preston in Lancashire. My brother signed the hire purchase form as I was far too young to do it, and I religiously paid it off by doing a paper round and various odd jobs. Over the years I changed the Strat's body colour a few times, and I learned enough to handle any problems that occurred, and even found re-fretting it quite an easy task.

'The Melodibeats carried on for several years, right through the British beat boom. When most players were into pop songs, I was strumming out foxtrots and quicksteps! We auditioned for some of the popular TV shows of the time, including *Opportunity Knocks* and *New Faces*, but to no avail.

'At that point I grew my hair and formed a rock band with a friend called Tony. I wanted a bit more output from the guitar, and luckily enough Tony was – and still is – an electronics expert, and he rewired my trusty '63 Strat as a stereo guitar. At the time I had a Selmer Stereomaster, a 50W-per-channel valve amp, and that did the trick for a while.

'This was around the late '60s, and guitars like the ES-345 and ES-355, as played by the likes of Freddie King and Chuck Berry, were very popular. So the switch to the real thing

'68 Gibson ES-345 and a Bahama Green Fender Strat Plus

Gibson '59 ES-335 reissue and a '66 Epiphone Casino

became an obvious decision, and in 1969 it became a reality when I part-exchanged the Strat for a new cherry Gibson 345 from Sid Munson's shop in Preston. I kept that guitar for several years, but it ended up under the bed when I got married, and the band eventually fell apart. A local shop knew it had become redundant and and asked if would I sell it, as Bill Nelson from Be Bop Deluxe was after a back-up 345. Regretfully I did just that, and exchanged it for a Carlsbro Stingray amp and a Guild guitar.'

Mistake or not, losing that 345 turned out to be pivotal in Nick's life. 'If we fast-forward many decades to when the mortgage wasn't too painful, I decided to retrace my steps and try and buy another ES-345,' he explains. 'That, in fact, was how I started my guitar business. By this time the internet was up and running, and I bought several ES-345s. I ended up with half a dozen at one point, but none of them felt like my original, so I decided to move a few on. Each time I made a small profit, and that, in hindsight, was how I started trading guitars. I've kept my '68 ES-345 because I think it's the closest to my original. It's a really nice example.

'In this business, as you can image, I have scores of great Fender Strats pass through my hands, and the temptation to keep one is often too much! Still, for now I've settled on this Strat Plus finished in Bahama Green. The Plus, as we know, was the forerunner of the Clapton Strat, and it came loaded with Lace Sensors, which I think are great.

'Though I grew up playing a Strat, over the years I've really come to appreciate semi-acoustics. This Gibson '59 335 reissue with the long pickguard and chunky neck makes the hairs on the back of my neck stand up... I could just cuddle it.

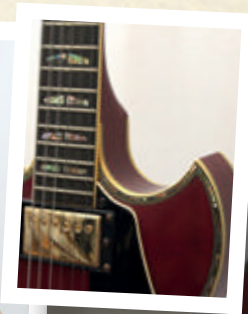
'This single-pickup Epiphone Casino is in remarkable condition. The Casino was built between 1961 and 1970, and by '66, when this one was made, the white pickguard and the chrome hardware were standard. By this time the necks were also fairly slim, which I really like. The P90 sitting in the middle gives a very unique, fat, mid-rangy sound, but due to John Lennon's association with the twin-pickup model, these single-pickup ones aren't so popular. This one came from some dealers friends of mine in Illinois, USA.

'There was a time when I couldn't even get my hands on, let alone afford, a wonderful guitar like this Gibson ES-175 from '54. I bought it from a guy in Liverpool about 15 years ago, at a time when I fell in love with blonde guitars. Apparently Gibson only shipped 129 samples in that year. There are a couple of hairline finish cracks, as you would expect from a guitar this old, but I looked it over and it's fine. I think it's a case of 'if it works, plays and sounds good, leave it alone'.

'The 175 sounds wonderful through my Gibson GA15RV amp – as does this Guild X-170 Mini Manhattan hollowbody, built in 1996. The neck is beautiful... it's just about the same thickness all the way up. I've sold several of these in the past, but this is a particularly fine example, so I kept it for myself! The "harp" tailpiece, the gold hardware and the SD1 humbuckers really look the part. I really like the sound of both these guitars, and the maple construction and floating bridge just adds to the character.

Nick also has some of his original 'pre-collection' guitars to hand. 'This Yamaha SG175 from 1976 is probably the solidbody guitar I've owned the longest,' he says. 'The SG175 was the forerunner of the more famous SG1500 and 2000. I'm pretty sure that photographs of Carlos Santana in that period show him playing a 175. It's very detailed, ↔

1996 Guild X-170 and a 1954 Gibson ES-175D



Yamaha SG175 and a '93 Les Paul Standard

An R8 Les Paul Std reissue and a 20th Anniversary Les Paul Custom

A '52 reissue Tele and an '84 Tele Elite

Nick with '63 Strat in the Melodibeats

with mother of pearl binding and gold hardware. This is a beautifully-made guitar, and the mahogany body isn't quite as deep as the later ones – I've never seen another like it.

'I used the Yamaha as my main gigging guitar for years. As I mentioned, the guitars here are the ones that I really don't want to let go of, the ones that I've not sold through the business. Some have been on the website a few times, but I've thought... no, this one stays. The Yamaha has been on the site, and I get an email at least once a year from an American guy asking me to sell it to him!

'While I do have Les Pauls here, I don't particularly get on with them all that well. They regularly drift through the business, though, and over the years I've kept a few that have appealed to me. I have a '92 cherryburst Standard which is a superb player and in excellent condition; an R8, which is Gibson's '58 reissue; and a 20th Anniversary Les Paul Custom, introduced in 1974, which has had the life gigged out of it and has faded from white to quite a deep cream colour. It has these cool Kluson waffleback tuners, so-named after the grooves on the back of the gear housings. They're nice tuners, an upgrade of the originals, and super-smooth with nylon worm bearings. Oh, and it's been signed on the back by Albert Lee, as well.

'This '52 reissue Tele is also a favourite. It's been gigged a lot but it's worn in well, and it just feels perfect. I love everything about this model. I've even wondered if they hand-pick the woods, as they never seem that heavy. The neck suits me perfectly.

'I kept this '84 Fender Telecaster Elite back for myself as I felt it was so different, and they're quite uncommon in black. It was never the most popular Fender by any means, but I really like it. Some players refer to this model as having one of the best Tele neck profiles for speed and accuracy. I believe it was the first active guitar that Fender produced, and it's got the TBX and MDX controls. I put out a tweet about this one, and I had a reply from Dave Davies of the Kinks saying he played one in the '80s.'

Nick is not one of those players who's too worried about condition – not if it's a guitar he's going to keep. 'Well, I wouldn't want it totally relic'ed or dragged around the stage,' he considers. 'I'd rather have a guitar with character and honest play wear.

'I like the odd project, too... I've just picked up a '65 Fender Jaguar as an on-going project. The bridge needs attention as there's a fair bit of corrosion happening... I knew it as soon as I opened the case, as it had that "deep river" musky smell about it.'

Ever the well-rounded guitar freak, Nick also has a space, or four, for a good acoustic guitar. The first one out into the light is a dreadnought from a Japanese brand more readily associated with drums.

'In the 1970s Tama produced a run of very high-spec acoustic guitars. This one came from Stephen's Musical in Leeds many years ago. They were originally produced in the Ibanez factory and some came with fine appointments like Brazilian rosewood and a bound fingerboard. It's basically a copy of a Martin D-28 or a D-35, but it's just about as good as any acoustic that I've ever had.

'Here's a Martin HD-28 from 1984, which was the last year of non-adjustable truss rods. It's amazing, really, when you think that Martin didn't use truss rods in their acoustics until after this time. This one has mellowed over the years, and it's got a sweet, rich tone.

'I do like to have a small-bodied acoustic lying around the house. Here's a steel-strung Galliano, made by Oscar Schmidt, who also made Stella acoustics. This one is possibly from the 1920s; it came in as a part-exchange, and I thought "Ah, I'll keep this one". Typical of the period is the decorative scene – in this case a Venetian theme – below the bridge. Because of the decoration, these are called "decalcomania" guitars. It has a lovely perky sound and, like a Stella, it's made from solid birch with ladder bracing and a big V neck. These kind of guitars were used by players like of Leadbelly and Blind Willie McTell, so it's a real piece of history.

'The guy who brought in the Galliano also part-exchanged this nylon-strung Spanish from the '60s. It's a good player and it came in an unusual vinyl Rotosound gigbag.' ↦

Left, a '70s Tama dreadnought; right, a Martin HD-28

1960s Spanish guitar and a Galliano parlour

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Two Music Man StingRays – one stock, the other with a graphite neck

Jazz Basses: an Antigua from '76 and a black '78 with EMGs

The second half of Nick's collection consists of a fine and varied assembly of basses. 'Going back about 18 years, I was still playing in various bands and jamming and writing songs with friends, one of whom was a local blues guitarist called Sean Silvester,' Nick explains. 'He called me one day saying he had put a band together, and I was quite excited... until he said I was going to be the bass player! I've never really looked back since then, and all this time I've been with Sean, playing bass with the Bluekings.'

Though Nick does own a double bass – a laminated Czechoslovakian model with a K&K Bass Master pickup system – the bulk of his working four-strings are electrics, which are fed through either an Ampeg SVT-3 Pro head and a 6x10" cab or, for smaller gigs, a Markbass 2x10" combo.

'I love Music Man StingRays – both for the way they play and the active circuitry,' he goes on. 'My second-choice bass is a honeyburst StingRay, while my number one is another StingRay – or, I should say, it's a bit of a hybrid.

'I was at a guitar show in the UK when a couple of dealer guys I knew said they had a honeyburst StingRay going really cheap, and of course my ears pricked up. I was a little disheartened when I saw it, though – it looked like someone had literally attacked it with a hammer. The body was in two pieces, it had splits and dents everywhere, and the frets were sticking up in a U shape. I have a feeling that there may have been a jealous partner involved...

'So I took it on as a project, filled the holes in the neck, gave it a re-fret, and sprayed it black. It worked fine, but the neck just didn't feel right, so I fitted a graphite neck which I bought from Status Graphite in Essex. It was a fairly light bass to start with, but now with the polyester finish removed and with the graphite neck and some lightweight Hipshot tuners, it weights just 8lbs. I can play it all night and I hardly even know it's strapped on.

'I also played Fender Jazz Basses for a while. I always liked the fast, narrow Jazz necks, and the sound they produce when you just back off the pickups would always win me over. I think most bass players who have gathered a handful of instruments usually have a Jazz Bass in there somewhere.

'I have two Jazzes at the moment – one from 1978 in the Antigua finish, and a black '76 fitted with EMG pickups.

'Of course, the other go-to model for most bass players is the Fender Precision. I've got four at the moment. There's a tobacco burst '78 with a maple fingerboard, an active 1982 Precision Special in candy apple red, and a natural-finish model from 1979 with an added Jazz Bass pickup. I also have a Japanese-made reissue from '86. I'm not really bothered whether I collect guitars from the vintage era or the modern day; not all vintage guitars are good, and some of the guitars and basses arriving from the Far East are fantastic, especially compared to what my generation had to learn on.

'Precisions just do the job... they're everything you expect from a classic design. It's hard for me to pick a favourite, but I do love the active sounds you get from the Special.

'The Rickenbacker is another well-known classic, and it's one of the first decent bass guitars I ever bought, although the 4003 I have now is only a few years old. I'm lucky to have a choice of basses when it comes to band rehearsals. I tend to get them out and give them an airing for 10 minutes or so, but I always seem to go back to playing the StingRay or the Rickenbacker.

'I don't generally go for the "typical" Rickenbacker bass sound, as I rarely use a pick. I seem to have developed my own style of almost fingerpicking on the bass. I think it's something that's developed from all the time I spent on double bass, and it makes it so much easier on a fast bass line... like a Dr Feelgood track, for example. I'm a bit old-school when it comes to really fast playing on bass or guitar. I'm not a metal fan... my feeling is, if you can't whistle it, there's no point in playing it!

↦

Left, a stock '78 P-Bass; right, an '82 Precision Special

1979 Precision with added pickup and a Japanese reissue

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A Rick Turner Electroline and a Rickenbacker 4003

1969 Dan Armstrong Plexiglas

Pictured above is an Electroline bass by maker Rick Turner of Santa Cruz, California. 'I adore the shape of this bass,' Nick recommends. 'It's so comfortable to play... even sitting down, it's a perfect fit. I'm not a fan of very heavy basses, and this one's really light; even with an ash body it's still just a touch over 8lbs, which is ideal for me. It's got two soapbar pickups, a piezo system and an 18v Highlander active preamp. Turner was one of the original directors of Alembic basses before he went off to do his own thing. People like Lindsey Buckingham and John Mayer play his guitars.

'The Dan Armstrong bass is one of the famous "plexiglas" models, and I'm sure you're aware of the difficulties of photographing these! The guitar version has been famous for years, but the basses are a little less well-known. They were first introduced at the Chicago NAMM show in 1969, and this example is from the first year of production; you can tell it's early as it doesn't have the toggle switch, which came later. It's got a great sound, though, and it's ideal if you want to look a bit different on stage, but it weighs a ton.

'The '73 Fender Musicmaster bass comes in at the other end of the scales. These are great little instruments and a relatively easy switch for when guitar players need to play bass – in the studio, for example. They're good to record with as they cover a lot of bass frequencies.

'I recently sold a Musicmaster to a guy who wanted a straightforward bass for recording... he was actually a drummer. I recognised him from somewhere, but it wasn't until he'd gone I realised he was Vijay Mistry, the drummer from the Kaiser Chiefs. You do get to meet a lot of famous names in this guitar-trading business.

'I really don't mind how quirky a bass is, as long as it works well and has a good reputation, which always helps when it comes to resale. This Supro Pocket Bass was made by Valco in 1965, and it came from a dealer I know in North Carolina. They're quite collectable and sought after, so I wasn't sure whether to keep it or move it on. For now, though, I'm liking it a little too much to part with it. The scale length is just 24.75", like a Gibson electric guitar, and it's incredibly light as the body is hollowed out. This was a super-cool guitar-sized bass when it first came out, and it really looks the part in black – which was the only available colour. It's got the trademark white headstock and a pair of transparent thumb and finger-rests. The Valco neck pickup gives a big, thumping sound, but you can also get a more percussive tone from the piezo at the bridge. I believe this little beauty was only in production for about four years. A lot of experienced bass players from that era still believe that this was one of the best basses for recording.

'The Mosrite Ventures bass dates from '66, the sixth of January to be precise, and it's finished in sunburst and has a single soapbar pickup in the neck position. The necks on Mosrite basses seem to have their own distinct profile. There's a lot of checking in the paintwork, but the red is still really vibrant for a guitar of this age. The position markers are virtually invisible in the dark, but thankfully the side dots are a little bigger. It's a milestone in rock'n'roll history. These sound great and look fantastic – I must gig this one more.

'Finally, I thought I'd include this Dobro D40E Texarkana resonator from '67, as it's from the era when Mosrite company founder Semie Moseley also owned Dobro. It plays really well, with a slim neck, and I have the action medium-to-low so it can handle slide or finger picking. This is a nice example of an electric resonator, with both an aluminium speaker cone and a single P90-type pickup.

'I've met a lot of beautiful people and made a lot of friends in this business. One guy calls me up just once a year and buys a guitar – it's his way of investing, rather than putting money in the bank, which I think makes sense in some ways. I've also met so many amazing young players, and I feel if I can help them out and find them the guitar they want at a decent price, then that's another goal achieved.'

For information on Nick Leggett and his guitars visit www.nicksguitars.com

Supro Pocket Bass and a '73 Fender Musicmaster bass

1966 Mosrite Ventures bass and a Dobro D40E

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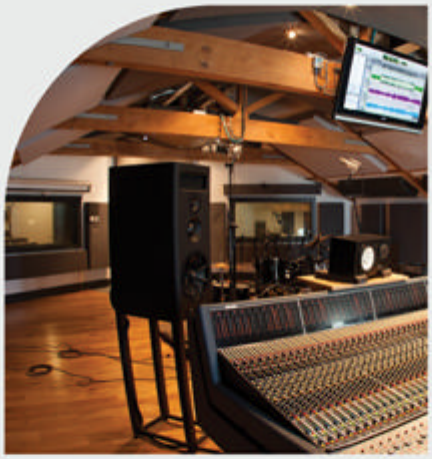

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THE GUITARIST'S LIFE CYCLE PT. 3

Do you consider yourself a guitarist? In the third part of his musings on musicians' outlooks through the decades, **Sid Bishop** considers self-identity

I've received some very welcome feedback from readers of my last article (thanks for that, please keep it coming) and especially following my revelation that I didn't even have a guitar in the house for a number of years. 'What kind of guitarist are you?' some of you have asked. I find that quite a tricky question. In my defence it was during a period when I wasn't in a band, let alone gigging, so I didn't actually need a guitar... added to which, for a variety of reasons my life took a slightly different direction during that stretch of time.

Despite that five or six year hiatus, however, yes, I am a guitarist, being that is part of who I am, and in due course I bought a new instrument and an amp and enthusiastically immersed myself in the whole circus once more. Perhaps I could only stand in the wings and watch for so long before the bug bit again. I can only offer the analogy of being an alcoholic: once you are one, you will remain so for life. There's no complete cure, and although you might be 'on the wagon' for long periods, slipping back into your old ways must be avoided at all costs. Guitars of course are not generally quite as destructive to one's health as bourbon and beer, so slipping into old ways doesn't carry quite the same risk.

Without getting too philosophical, what about that question of being 'a guitarist', and how that is part of one's 'identity'? Even guitar players are people, and consequently come in many varieties. They range, as I have said elsewhere, from bedroom hobbyists up to hardworking lifelong professionals who depend upon their skill to earn a livelihood, and would justifiably refer to themselves as 'guitarists'. It's unlikely that the guy sat in his bedroom, if asked what the principal driving force in his life was, would ever think of describing himself as a guitarist, even though he may well possess a jaw-dropping talent, and to give such players due credit I have encountered a few of his kind who are very skilled indeed. The one thing that mystifies me about guys like that is that they never do gigs, seemingly have no plans to, and I have to ask myself 'So what's the point?' When I'd decided that I'd become good enough (probably prematurely), the one thing I most wanted to do was get into a band and go and do some gigs. To me, that's what it was all about. There are of course a few stages between these two extremes, and in addition the course our life takes as it gradually ebbs away dictates, to some extent, what we do with our guitar-related endeavours. Circumstances change.

Just a few years after I'd left school I was fortunate enough to have landed a gig in a pro touring band, and even had an album out. By chance I bumped into one of my old schoolmates who asked me what I was up to. I said 'I'm a professional guitarist now'. Just saying that felt great – so great, in fact, that I was tempted to immediately repeat the statement. It was like I'd ↦

The Conchords at school, 1962

The Southside Blues Band, my first properly gigging band, 1965

The Deviants with the late Mick Farren at a Royal Institute Of British Architects gig, 1967. Yoko Ono did the lights

'When I'd decided I'd become good enough, the one thing I wanted to do was get into a band and do some gigs'

Bishops Big Boppers, Tunbridge Wells, around 1973

The Hardtops, Chiltern Crest Hotel, Milton Keynes, 1993

'Do guitar players give off some hidden message, by pheromones perhaps, or is there a form of subliminal signalling?'

just grown three inches. It was so much better than having to tell him that I was selling paint in B&Q, or pointlessly shuffling around pieces of paper in an insurance office. The look on his face was priceless.

When any of us start out learning guitar, it is probably unlikely that we will have any clear idea of where this new-found talent will take us. For some it might be no more than a five-minute wonder, as playing a guitar actually turns out to be quite hard work and makes your fingers hurt. Most of those guys will get it out of their systems fairly quickly and put the guitar down, in all probability never to pick one up again. Some others evolve, perhaps unexpectedly, into quite competent players and persevere, eventually becoming semi-pro, or even totally professional in one form or another, either as performers or as session musicians. Yet others enter the fray with stars in their eyes and dedicate their lives to the instrument almost as if it were a divine mission, bearing with them a lifelong conviction that they are destined to be guitar gods, though I still have a theory that every player will only rise to the level of their own competence. In the real world just a tiny percentage actually reach their goal without ever having to get a 'proper' job. They certainly pay their dues, spending months, even years, schlepping up and down the M1 rattling around in the back of a van, their lives at some point doomed to include a period starving in a damp bedsit, and having to endure a constant revolving door of girlfriends whose patience and charity quickly wears thin. All their sacrifices will be rewarded however, one day... perhaps.

Some are more fortunate (often just a matter of being in the right place at the right time). But if the big break just doesn't happen, or even if for some reason the whole enterprise just becomes too much to handle, there are those who end up working in guitar shops (guilty as charged, yer honour) or even writing articles for publications such as this one, so our talents are not entirely wasted. Leaving aside any concerns about a lifetime career, to many of us a more important achievement is that we can now play Neil Giraldo's solo from Rick Springfield's *Jessie's Girl* note for note (a real stinker, try it).

Some years ago I attended a friend's wedding, and upon reaching the reception venue was invited to take a seat at any table that appealed to me. I selected a suitable place at which a handful of others were already seated, and engaged them in conversation. It turned out that three of them were guitar players, one was a record producer, and yet another was a record collector.

Why was I attracted, seemingly by pure chance, to that particular table? Do guitar players give off some sort of hidden message, via pheromones perhaps, or is there some form of a more subliminal signalling going on? Is there a Freemason's lodge whose membership consists only of guitarists?

There's no doubt in my mind that being a guitar player enrols you, by default, into a club. This is bought home to me whenever I visit a guitar show. I invariably get chatting to some rather odd guy, who if I'd met on a bus or in the supermarket wouldn't have given the time of day, but we end up discussing at great length the pros and cons of rubber versus plastic selector switch grommets, or the vagaries of Rickenbacker serial numbers.

I have greatly enjoyed being a guitar player, and I still do despite all the ups and downs – and there's certainly been a few downs. But I've been lucky enough to have spent most of the last fifty years earning a living doing something I love and still find endlessly rewarding. I continue to do so, and hopefully you will too.

Same gig, trying to murder an innocent Fender Esquire

In my current band Crime Scene at an outdoor gig near Consett, Co. Durham, earlier this year

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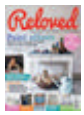

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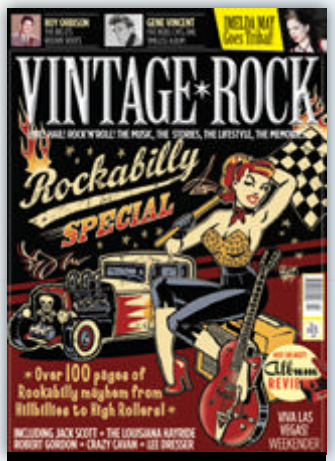

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DRILLS FOR
THRILLS

Fingerstyle Jazz

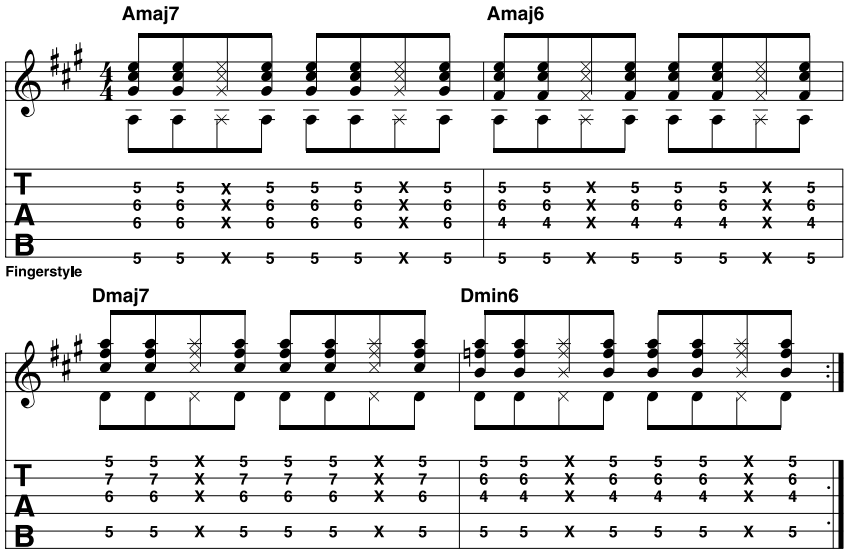
Using the chords we've learned before, let's get that right hand working...

As in last month's Drills For Thrills, this month's two exercises provide a suitably testing work out for the plucking hand using some of the jazz-style chords we've used in the last three workshops. Designed to be played fingerstyle, this month's exercises are based on a percussive accompaniment technique. Exercise 1 introduces the technique in a controlled environment, as it were (basically, the timing and coordination are kept very simple), then as we move onto Exercise 2. The aim is to get the much more musical pattern as smooth and playable as you are able to at a fairly brisk tempo.

1 PERCUSSIVE EFFECTS

4/4 TIME

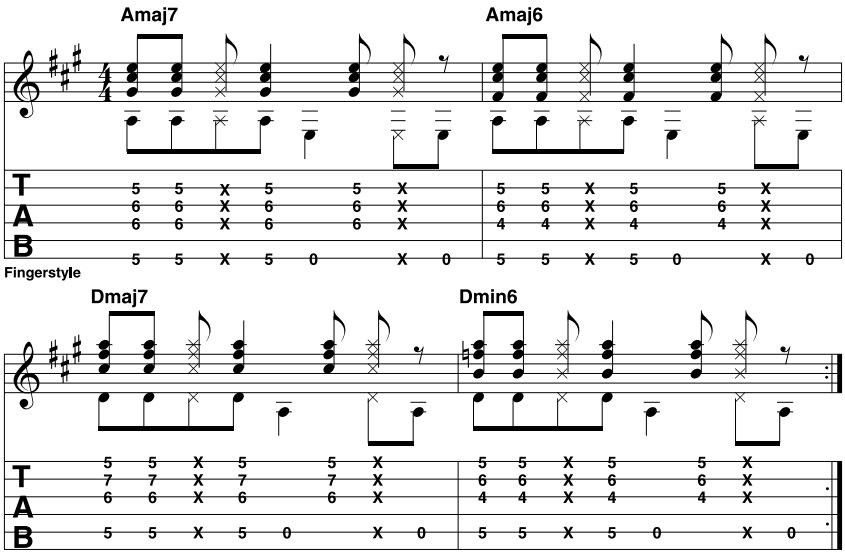
Pluck the strings with thumb and three fingers. The percussive effect shown by the 'X's in the music notation and tablature can be created in a variety of ways. Simply replacing the thumb and fingers used to pluck the strings back onto the strings with a degree of forcefulness will produce percussive clicks as the deadened strings hit the fretboard; for a more pronounced effect, as you replace the thumb and fingers onto the strings use the palm of the plucking hand or the front wrist of the plucking hand to gently hit the top of the guitar immediately above the sixth string, creating a sound which is more of a thud than a click. Experiment with these two techniques and find a version that works for you. In order to enable non-music readers to be able to play the exercise, the rhythm is kept very straightforward – it's basically steady quavers. Start slowly, say crotchet = 60, and aim to work up towards crotchet = 140.



2 ADDED VARIATION

4/4 TIME

As in Exercise 1, the rhythm here is also steady quavers, but now more coordination is employed between the bass note and upper notes to fashion Exercise 1 into a musically interesting accompaniment. Also, the bass note alternates between the root of each chord and either the open bottom string or open fifth string in order to make the bass line more interesting. As ever, practice slowly, crotchet = 60 again, and gradually push up the tempo only when you can play it consistently, aiming for crotchet = 140. Once you have mastered this, try applying the pattern to other chord progressions.



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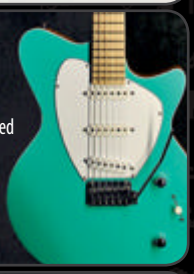

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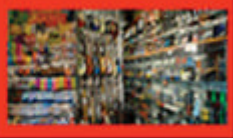

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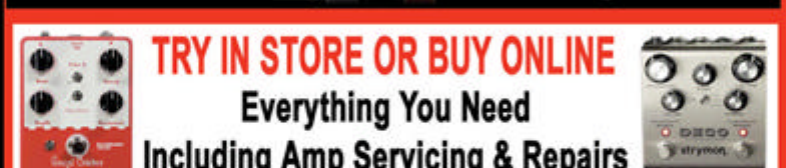

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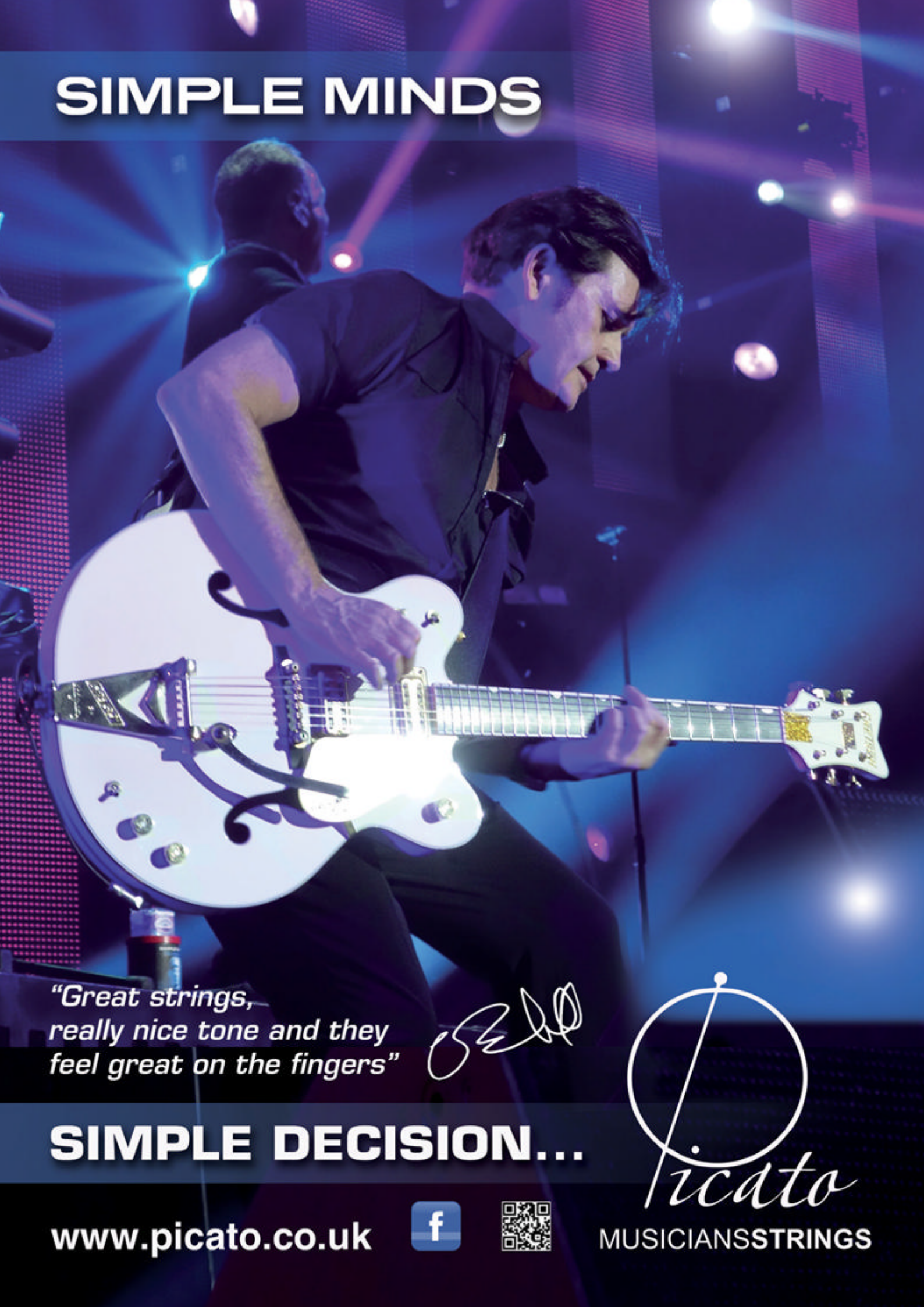
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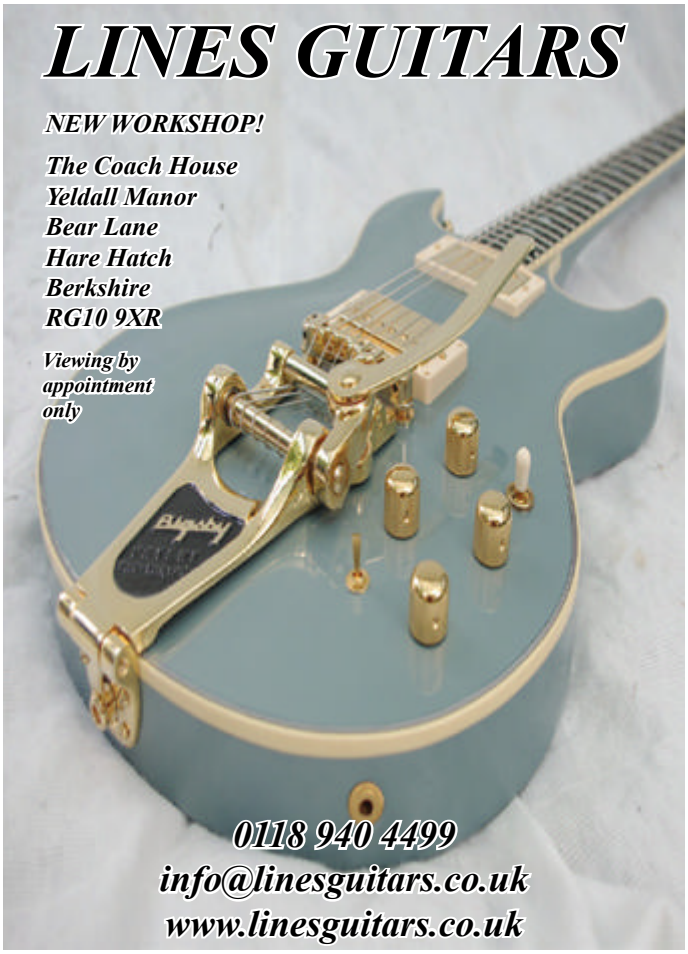

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Fender Mini Strat, candy apple red, as new, £55 ovno. Tel: 07518 968828, Liverpool

Roland JC-120, serial no. BB39396, home use only, with speakers, £475 ono. Tel: Richard 07811 543024, Wakefield

Left-handed Gibson Custom Shop Les Paul Standard '58, VOS, washed cherry sunburst, few marks, full case candy, £1700 ono. Tel: Simon 07887 952916, Cumbria

Fender Custom Shop Limited Edition Relic Tele, white blonde over ash, rosewood 10" board, Abby pickups, cream case and all candy, coa, ect, £1850. Tel: 01255 435967, Essex

Gretsch Electromatic Pro Jet, black with Bigsby, excellent condition, gig bag, purchased new, home use only, never gigged, £245 ono. Tel: Mike 01444 254597, West Sussex

Dean resonator, engraved chrome, gold coverplate, piezo/magnetic pickups, £300. Squier Affinity Tele, white, unplayed, £100. Squier Hello Kitty Strat, black, VGC £230 ono. Buyer collects. Tel: 01225 862255, Wiltshire

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Squier Tom Delonge Strat, white, very good condition, home use only, gig bag, strap and lead, £125. Tel: 07714 300554 or email alexanderzz@blueyonder.co.uk

WANTED

Squier Super-Sonic Japan, late '90s, blue sparkle preferred. Call Ron 01384 873390, Stourbridge

Gibson Les Paul R9 Plaintop 1997-2003 Historic Custom Shop, original to 'player', fair price paid. Tel: 07814 797163 or email glen1149@hotmail.com, Devon

Digitech RP-6 or RP-7. Must be good condition and price, may collect. Tel: 07923 801153

Kay K592 Red Devil 1960s, must have Bigsby and white guard, in good to reasonable condition. Tel: Alan 0115 9255566

Mesa/Boogie Express 5:25, good condition, pref London area. Tel: Mick 020 8530 1208

Tailpiece for Gibson ES-140 3/4 scale with 'ridged' crossbar. Also Gibson pickguard: five-ply (B/W/B/W/B) '50s 'Royalite' type to cut for my ES-5. Tel: Geoff 01162 891919, Leicestershire

Yamaha SG200 wanted, pearl white finish. Tel/txt: 07710 161598 or email Chris-r1968@hotmail.co.uk

Award-Session Stockton amp wanted. Tel: 07887 972019, Lanarkshire

Fender soft-V neck wanted for Baja Tele, vgc or as new. Tel: 01429 296413, Teesside

Vintage Paradise guitar. Txt/call: Andy 07944 651798 or email delavigne@btinternet.com

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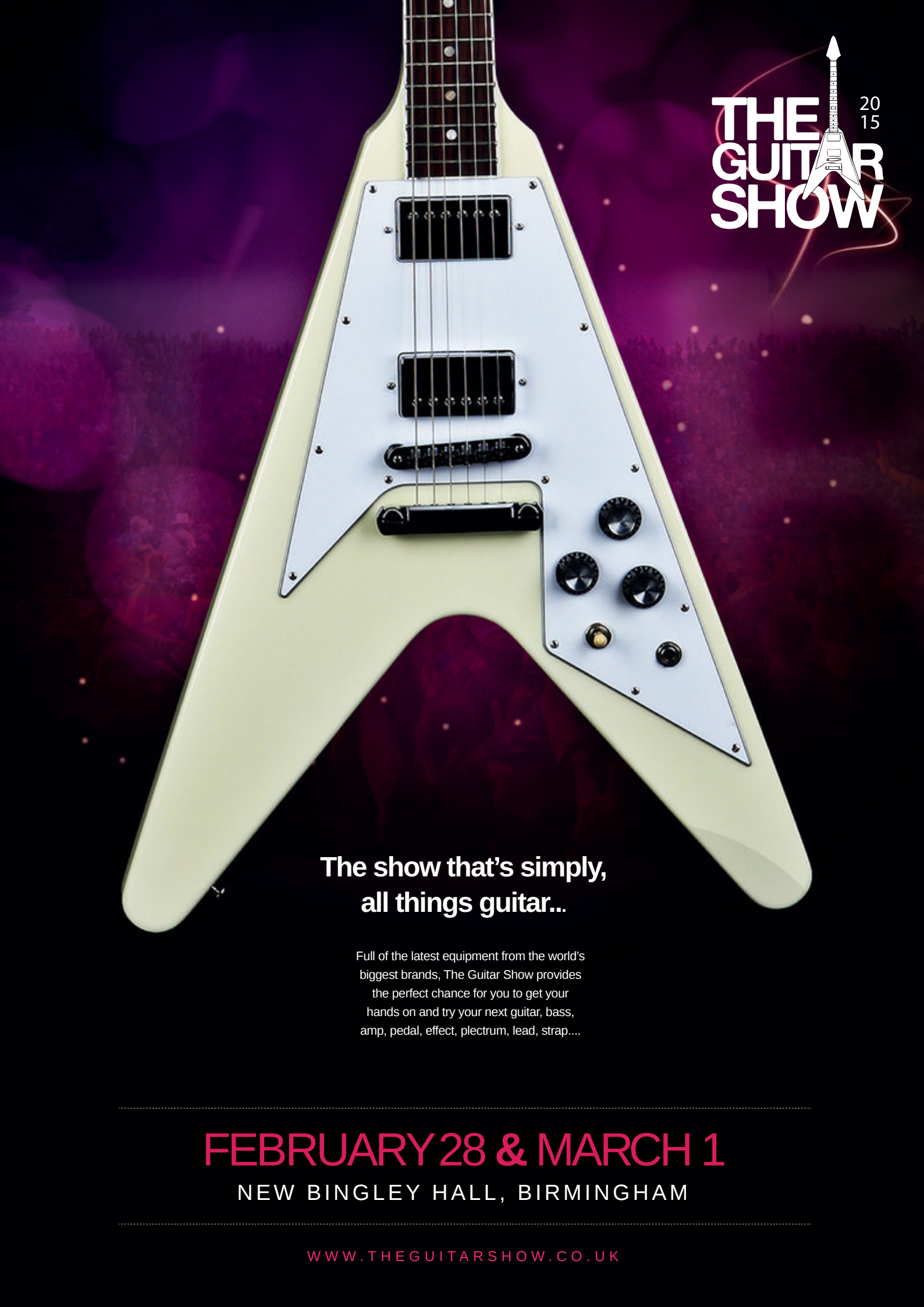
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Soundtrack of my life

Richard Durrant

The English multi-instrumentalist on the music that formed his extremely wide-ranging tastes

At the age of 16 classical guitar troubadour Richard Durrant was already performing solo, even taking on a tour of Portugal performing the bone-crunchingly difficult Aranjuez guitar concerto. The young Durrant also played string bass in a Brighton-based bluegrass band and could be heard most Saturdays busking on his steel-strung guitar. Now, nearly 30 years after his South Bank debut recital, Durrant is still confounding convention, billed as the barefoot, stand-up, un-classical guitarist and performing an unpredictable mix of solo guitar music. He has earned worldwide recognition for his recordings and performances of music by the great Paraguayan composer Agustin Barrios, and his latest album offers another left-field turn, taking on music by Vivaldi, Bach and Boccherini, backed by Howard Beach on harpsichord. A true maverick, Durrant's sonic adventures continue to delight and intrigue.

Alirio Diaz

PLAYS GUITAR MUSIC OF SPAIN AND LATIN AMERICA

I was given this record for Christmas when I was eight and, to this day, I believe it is easily the most beautiful classical guitar record ever made.

Diaz plays with joy, commitment and (best of all) total abandon throughout. On side two – worn smooth on my copy – his sublime renditions of Barrios are the best recorded.

John Cage

SONATAS AND INTERLUDES FOR PREPARED PIANO

I love this collection of recordings. What emanates from my speakers soothes my entire house whilst optimising my personal, organic hard drive. It is music for the subconscious mind, the sounds of a delicate, divine wind chime with the beautiful mind of Cage gently tweaking things behind the scenes.

Django Reinhardt & Stephane Grappelly

THE QUINTET OF THE HOT CLUB OF FRANCE

I believe that Django is the greatest guitarist of all time, and these are his best recordings. Playing the actual vinyl is special, it's as if you can sense him in the room; the apostolic line of the record stamper leading one back into the presence of Django himself.

Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain

THE SECRET OF LIFE

They asked me to produce this album for them in 2004. I obliged, and my ukulele adventures began. It's a fabulous collection of performances and songs which left me in awe of this loveable collection of uke-toting freaks. They are the best live band in the UK, and I'm lucky to have worked with them.

The Beatles

ABBEY ROAD

Beatles music is embedded in my psyche, part of my DNA. *Abbey Road* is my favourite as there is such depth to stare into and this makes it a wonderful rollercoaster of an album. There's even a good chunk of instrumental music. Imagine that, the Beatles playing instrumentals... really quite prog.

XTC

DRUMS AND WIRES

I have a secret love of Andy Partridge and his mates, and XTC's *Love On A Farmboy's Wages* [on *Mummer*] is in my top five singles. *Drums And Wires* has such finesse and authority. There's tight, poppy songwriting, Colin Moulding's free-roving basslines and, most importantly, Partridge's crunchy guitar voicings.

Herbert Von Karajan

BRAHMS 4TH SYMPHONY

From the opening falling third on the cellos to the dense divisi strings, this is awesomely beautiful symphonic music. Throughout my musical life Brahms has stayed strangely close to me. His music is fresher than ever, almost minimalist in its complete sound, and brimming with intense spirituality.

Mike Oldfield

TUBULAR BELLS

14 minutes and 18 seconds into side one Oldfield plays a passage first on strummed electric guitars and then repeated with overdubbed acoustic steel-strung guitars. The contrasts I heard in this change of instruments floored me – there was so much sonic beauty in one change of timbre. For me, it was a life-changing moment.

Lawrence Casserley & Jean-Michel Van Schouwburg

MOUTHWIND

Any album by Casserley is a crazy celebration of sonic freedom. Here he continues his exploration with humour, artistry and big ears. A Bach chorale, a piece of banana in a hoover pipe, a church bell – it's all music to my ears. There's so much more to life than tunes.

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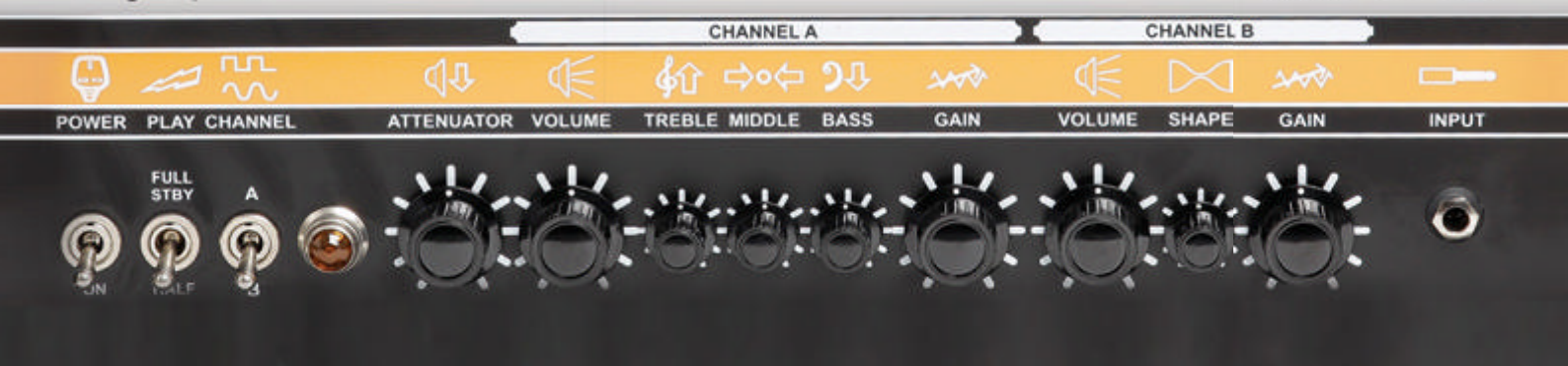
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